

Real World Graduation: Question 49: Malaria

Edward D. Duvall
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Question 49

A chemical known as dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane was accidentally discovered in 1874 by O. Zeidler; and was re-discovered by P. Muller in 1939. It was found to be a very effective pesticide. Its name was abbreviated to DDT, and was produced commercially and used widely from 1943 until it was banned from use in 1972. It was banned due to allegations, since proven to be false, that DDT caused the thinning of bird's eggs, caused cancer in humans, and reduced the populations of eagles, falcons, and pelicans. The main reason it was banned was because the environmental activists wanted to establish a power base, and used the banning of DDT as their test case. The greatest benefit of DDT was in combating the mosquito-borne disease malaria: while it was being used, several million deaths from malaria were prevented [1]. Malaria has always been fairly rare in the U. S.

Since DDT was banned, about 300 to 500 million cases of malaria occur worldwide each year, and about 1 million black people in southern Africa die from it; most of these fatalities are children under 5 years of age. There is at present no vaccine for malaria; and treatment of it must occur rapidly and in the right dosage; otherwise relapses may occur (sometimes decades later) [2].

The best way to prevent an outbreak of malaria is to suppress the population of the mosquito that spreads it. Consider the following scenario. An infestation of the malaria-transmitting mosquito is discovered in Manhattan (part of New York City), and the use of pesticides other than DDT proved ineffective in reducing the mosquito population. Because malaria is so rare in the U. S., Americans have no immunity to the disease (since immunity comes from exposure). Experts therefore predict that about 15% of the population of Manhattan would get malaria, and about 5000 people living in Manhattan (nearly all children) would be expected to die from the epidemic. What would happen?

- a) The people of Manhattan would all temporarily move to their upstate summer homes, and wait for the epidemic to move to Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, the Bronx, and New Jersey.
- b) The people of Manhattan would sell their homes, quit their jobs, and move elsewhere.
- c) The people of Manhattan would stay put, continue their normal activities, and watch 5000 children die; reasoning that it is only fair that each resident of Manhattan accept the same risks as other people, especially since malaria is a naturally-occurring disease.
- d) The people of Manhattan would remain in Manhattan, but would close themselves up in their homes as a self-imposed quarantine, until all the mosquitoes either died or moved elsewhere.
- e) Some combination of a) through d). In other words, those who could afford to move would do so; those who could maintain quarantine would do so, and those who could do neither would have to risk their children's lives.

[1] www.junkscience.com/ddtfaq.htm

[2] www.cdc.gov/malaria/faq.htm

Answer to Question 49

This is a trick question. All of the answers are wrong.

None of the answers are practical, for obvious economic reasons. The people of Manhattan would stage a massive public relations campaign, led by the Manhattan-based mainstream media. They would likely blame the malaria outbreak on a fictional right-wing conspiracy, and demand DDT treatment throughout Manhattan although 99% of those residents oppose DDT use in general.

The correct answer is that they would spray DDT everywhere in all five boroughs until all the mosquitoes were dead. This action would be endorsed by every environmental group in the U. S. That is exactly what they should do. It is also what should be done in southern Africa. On the other hand, the environmental activists and their advocates in the Democratic party are not worried too much about 1 million black children dying every year. They are exceedingly worried if a few hundred children of wealthy white people in Manhattan were to die because of their policy; after all, it is those wealthy white people in Manhattan who can give big contributions to the environmental groups and the Democratic party.

If malaria actually did break out in Manhattan, you would see first-hand the hypocrisy of the do-gooders in the ivory towers when their children are threatened.