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## **PIONEERING MALARIA RESEARCH IDENTIFIES BEST TREATMENT FOR MONKEY MALARIA**

The first clinical trial ever performed in people with monkey malaria has shown that a key combination of antimalarial drugs works well in curing the infection. The study has just been published in the prestigious international journal, *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*.

The monkey parasite, an emerging infection called *Plasmodium knowlesi*, has become the most common cause of human malaria in Malaysia and is also found throughout southeast Asia.

Clinical researcher at Darwin's Menzies School of Health Research, Dr Matthew Grigg worked in collaboration with a number of hospital, community and local government stakeholders in Sabah, Malaysia to conduct this study.

"While a number of different drugs have been used to treat this infection, this is the first randomised controlled trial to be conducted for uncomplicated knowlesi malaria to define the optimal treatment in both adults and children.

"We compared an artemisinin-combination therapy (ACT) called artesunate-mefloquine against chloroquine to see how quickly they clear parasites in the blood," Dr Grigg said.

"We showed that while both drugs were able to cure the infection, ACT was able to clear parasites and fever faster, allowing earlier hospital discharge, and also reduced the risk of anaemia".

A key collaborator on the project, Dr Timothy William from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Clinical Research Centre, Malaysia explained the importance of the study.

"The World Health Organisation only recently recommended ACT for *P. knowlesi* malaria in their 2015 Malaria Treatment Guidelines, however this is the first study specifically designed to provide evidence for this policy change".

"Because other species of malaria parasites causing infection in Sabah look similar under the microscope to the monkey parasites, they are often misdiagnosed as each other. As these other parasites are usually resistant to chloroquine, treating them with chloroquine as though they were monkey malaria can have dangerous consequences."

"We have now shown that all species respond well to ACT, including monkey malaria. This means we can safely use ACT for malaria caused by all the parasite species in Malaysia. These findings are groundbreaking and will be disseminated to inform knowlesi malaria treatment policy in this region," Dr William said.

Community and local government stakeholder meetings will be held to share the results and guide state and national treatment policy.

The research findings support a unified ACT treatment plan that covers all *Plasmodium* species, helping to save more lives in the southeast Asian region.

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**Menzies Background**

Menzies School of Health Research is Australia's leading medical research institute dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. We have a 30 year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific, as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. We collaborate to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.