



## Common ailments of children at STACC-supported clinics

**Infection with intestinal worms** (hookworm, roundworm and whipworm) are common in Africa where millions of people are infected. The worms are known as soil-transmitted helminths (STH) since infection results from infective stages contaminating human habitations where sanitation is inadequate or lacking. The severity of their impact, which is most serious in children, depends on the number of worms present. Reduced food intake, nausea, abdominal pain, impaired growth, poor nutritional status, iron deficiency and weak educational performance are frequent consequences of infection. Treatment (deworming) depends on regular oral doses with one of the medicines recommended by the World Health Organization.

**Malaria** results from acquisition of parasitic protozoa of the genus *Plasmodium* injected into the bloodstream during the blood-sucking activity of female anophiline mosquitoes. The disease is often fatal in children who have not had time to develop some degree of partial immunity. Treatment is not always straightforward particularly if the *Plasmodium* has become resistant to available medicines. Control is difficult because mosquitoes breed in exposed water. Use of insecticide-treated bednets helps to avoid mosquito bites and so helps to reduce episodes of malaria.

**Respiratory tract infections** (RTIs) caused by viruses or bacteria are more common in children than adults. Upper respiratory tract infections (URTIs) include laryngitis, tracheitis and bronchitis and are usually due to viruses. Lower respiratory tract infections (LRTIs) include bronchiolitis, bronchitis and pneumonia and maybe due to bacteria as well as viruses. Frequently observed symptoms for RTIs are headache, fever, pain and coughing.

**Schistosomiasis** (Bilharzia) results from infection with blood flukes of the genus *Schistosoma*. Over 200 million people are infected in Africa and most of these are children. The flukes occupy blood vessels of the hepatic portal system (intestinal schistosomiasis) or the urinary tract (urinary schistosomiasis). Infection occurs when minute immature worms, released into water from snails, penetrate human skin. Severe damage to internal organs and blood loss occurs. Control is difficult since it involves increasing the supply of safe water and reducing human contact with water harbouring infected snails. Successful treatment is achieved with an annual measured oral dose of praziquantel as recommended by the World Health Organization.

**Dental fluorosis** results from excessive exposure to high concentrations of fluoride which adversely affects the formation of dental enamel. Children suffering from dental fluorosis have mottled teeth with a pitted and rough surface. Cleaning teeth is made difficult and gum infections may develop. Sufferers often have significant embarrassment and anxiety over the appearance of their teeth.