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‘Benign’ malaria just as deadly

A STRAIN of malaria thought to be relatively harmless is just as lethal as the infamous type, Australian researchers have discovered.

Malaria kills one child every 30 seconds, most of them in Africa with a strain called *P. falciparum*, believed to be the most deadly type of the illness.

But work by a team at the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin has revealed the other major strain, called *P. vivax*, thought to be benign, is potentially fatal too.

This strain is responsible for up to 400 million cases of malaria each year and is active in Asia where it causes almost half the incidents of illness.

The parasite is also causing major problems in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea due to drug resistance.

More than 300 cases are reported each year in Australia among travellers returning from en-

democratic countries.

Research conducted in Papua, Indonesia has shown *P. vivax* is far from benign and is responsible for a significant amount of illness with high rates of severe disease and death.

And in many cases, victims are infected with a mixture of both parasites, resulting in an even higher risk of severe disease than infection with a single parasite.

“Our findings show that in a region where multi drug-resistant strains of malaria are common, *P. vivax* infection is associated with severe and fatal malaria, particularly in young children,” said researcher Dr Ric Price.

“We have also shown that people infected with both types of malaria parasite are more likely to suffer from a severe case of malaria and, importantly, that similar proportions of patients infected with *P. vivax* and *P. falciparum* die from the disease.”