Viewpoint: Gene drive technology could eliminate malaria. But we must get it right, first

People don’t give people malaria: The 460 species of mosquitoes in the genus Anopheles do, and researchers are taking aim at them. One approach uses genetic engineering to reduce, or even eliminate, populations of malaria-carrying mosquitoes — for example, by modifying males to ensure that all their offspring are infertile. Another more elegant tactic uses genetic modifications to make mosquitoes immune to the malaria plasmodium, the parasite that causes the disease. Either kind of change can be amplified by doing the genetic engineering along with a trick called “gene drive,” which speeds the spread of such changes through a population.

The stakes of deploying or not deploying such research are high: From the moment we develop such technologies, “every day we wait kills between 1,200 and 2,000 people.”

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Can we in good conscience hold off from using these technologies as soon as possible? Yes, we can. In spite of the stakes — in some ways because of the stakes — it is important that we get this right before we try it. We have a moral imperative to fight malaria, but we also need a better understanding of the environmental, medical and political risks before we rush in.

Read full, original post: Combating malaria by modifying mosquitoes could save thousands of lives. It’s also risky.