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► **COVER:** 'Swarming' by Tom Wilson, inspired by the review on p887. Original image courtesy of P. Fineran.



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As the end of another year draws to a close, institutions everywhere are reflecting on the performance levels achieved and the progress made towards the realization of long-term goals. One initiative, more important than most, which certainly merits such an appraisal, is the Millennium Development Goals. Infectious diseases that impact on the fourth goal, which calls for a two-thirds reduction in mortality in children under 5 years, and the fifth goal, which calls for an improvement in maternal health — both by 2015 — are featured in this month's issue.

On page 900, William Moss and Diane Griffin review the pathogenesis of measles and the prospects for its elimination. This vaccine-preventable disease is a major cause of childhood mortality, and is estimated to have caused 454,000 deaths in 2004. Also with this issue, we feature the second in our series of diagnostic evaluation guides (<http://www.nature.com/nrmicro/supplements>), this month focusing on bacterial sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Syphilis kills more than 1 million babies each year worldwide, and gonorrhoea and genital chlamydia are major causes of reproductive disorders in women. Further supplements in the series planned for 2007 will tackle dengue, TB and leishmaniasis.

And the end-of-year verdict? In this the season of goodwill, there are reasons to be hopeful. For measles, considerable progress in its control has been achieved, with the 2004 statistics representing a 48% decrease from the measles-related deaths recorded in 1999. For bacterial STIs, a crucial reason for hope is that syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia can all be cured with a single dose of antibiotic: achieving early and accurate diagnosis at the point of care is the key requirement. The guide associated with this issue shows the way.

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