

SEASONAL DISEASES

Malaria

Heightened risk situation

Recent heavy rains and the arrival of cyclone Eloise in Mozambique pose a threat of increased malaria transmission in the southern African region. An epidemic preparedness and response (EPR) plan has been initiated by the National Department of Health and its subsidiaries, partners, and affiliates, including the NICD, Medical Research Council, provincial malaria control programmes and communicable disease control coordinators, primary health care providers, environmental and port health services, and others. The plan encompasses the broad areas of vector control (NICD's Vector Control Reference Laboratory leads this), health promotion and risk communication, parasitological surveillance and active malaria case detection, and case management.

The easing of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, coupled with this seasonally increased malaria incidence, means that local populations and visitors in malaria risk areas need to be aware of the possibility of higher local malaria transmission frequency.

Concomitantly, travel-related imported cases in non-endemic metropolitan areas are likely to increase. The overlap in clinical presentation between malaria and COVID-19 has been emphasised on several occasions in the Communiqué (see NICD Communicable Disease Communiqué issues for September 2020 through January 2021). Missed or delayed recognition of malaria has the potential for a tragic outcome. Any person presenting with fever and progressive 'flu-like symptoms who lives in, or has recently visited, a malaria-endemic area, should be checked for malaria, irrespective of pending or completed tests for SARS-CoV-2 infection. Occasionally, malaria vector mosquitoes may be accidentally transported to non-endemic areas and transmit the disease, a scenario that typically leads to delayed diagnosis and serious disease, particularly while attention is so focused on COVID-19 (see NICD Communicable Disease Communiqué January 2021; Vol. 20 (1): 11).