

SEASONAL DISEASES

Malaria

Heightened risk situation continues

The recent general high rainfall in the southern African region means continued increased risk of malaria transmission. Recent entomological surveillance data show that high numbers of malaria vector mosquitoes are being found in the malaria-endemic districts in South Africa, with a likely corresponding rise in malaria exposure risk in residents and visitors in these areas.

The easing of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, both for internal and cross-border travel, coupled with this seasonally increased malaria incidence, means that local populations, visitors, and healthcare workers in malaria risk areas need to increase their awareness of malaria, and correspondingly apply the recommended malaria preventive measures. Concomitantly, travel-related imported cases in non-endemic metropolitan areas, particularly in Gauteng Province, are likely to increase. There is a high likelihood of a third wave of COVID-19 disease in

April, which is still within the usual malaria transmission season, with much Easter holiday travel involving malaria areas. 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 February 2021). Missed or delayed recognition of malaria has the potential for serious illness or death. 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 situation 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).