

SEASONAL DISEASES

Malaria

Malaria transmission season 2020-2021

Even though the month of May is generally regarded as the end of the high malaria risk season in South Africa, no month of the year is without reports of malaria, as importation and local transmission continue during winter. While the currently available malaria case data are preliminary and may change as they are updated and verified, it is clear that reported malaria case numbers in the 2020-2021 season have reduced by about 60%, compared with the same period (September- April) for the 2019-2020 season. Despite imported cases comprising similar proportions of the totals in both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 seasons, the overall case numbers have reduced considerably. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is known to have had negative effects on some individual patients with malaria, such

as illness or mortality due to delayed and/or missed infections, border closures and travel restrictions, both internal and external, appear to have contributed to the reductions in the reported numbers of malaria cases. Anticipation of the potential negative effects of the pandemic on malaria, and efforts to adapt to circumstances and to mitigate these, have probably helped maintain the provincial malaria control programmes' functions. The predicted increase in vector breeding due to higher rainfall and summer temperatures in some areas apparently did not translate into higher reported malaria cases. However, the caveat is that reporting efficiency may have diminished due to reduced health services capacity and resources.