

SEASONAL DISEASES

Malaria

The number of malaria cases reported from the three malaria-endemic provinces, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga, during the first quarter of 2021, is much lower than the corresponding periods in 2019 and 2020 (Figure 5). Encouragingly, the recent relaxation of the COVID-19 related travel restrictions has not resulted in any significant increase in malaria case numbers, to date. Although the peak malaria season in South Africa is nearing its end and the malaria incidence is expected to decrease further, it is critical that healthcare professionals maintain a high index of suspicion for malaria when a patient presents with fever and flu-like symptoms. During the first quarter of 2021, all three malaria-endemic provinces reported increases in malaria-related deaths, primarily due to the delayed diagnosis of malaria and the late presentation of the patient at a healthcare facility. As low-

level malaria transmission continues during the colder winter months, anyone with a fever, resident in or with recent travel to or from a malaria-endemic area, should be tested concurrently for both malaria and COVID-19. Malaria treatment should be started as soon as a malaria-positive result is obtained, to prevent progression to severe illness. The first-line treatment for uncomplicated malaria, artemether-lumefantrine, remains highly effective in South Africa, although there have been recent reports of artemisinin-resistant parasites emerging in Rwanda. It is therefore essential that compliance is encouraged and every dose of artemether-lumefantrine is taken with 1.2g of fatty food or drink (e.g. full-cream dairy products) for optimal absorption. If travelling to malaria-endemic areas, pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical preventative measures are recommended.

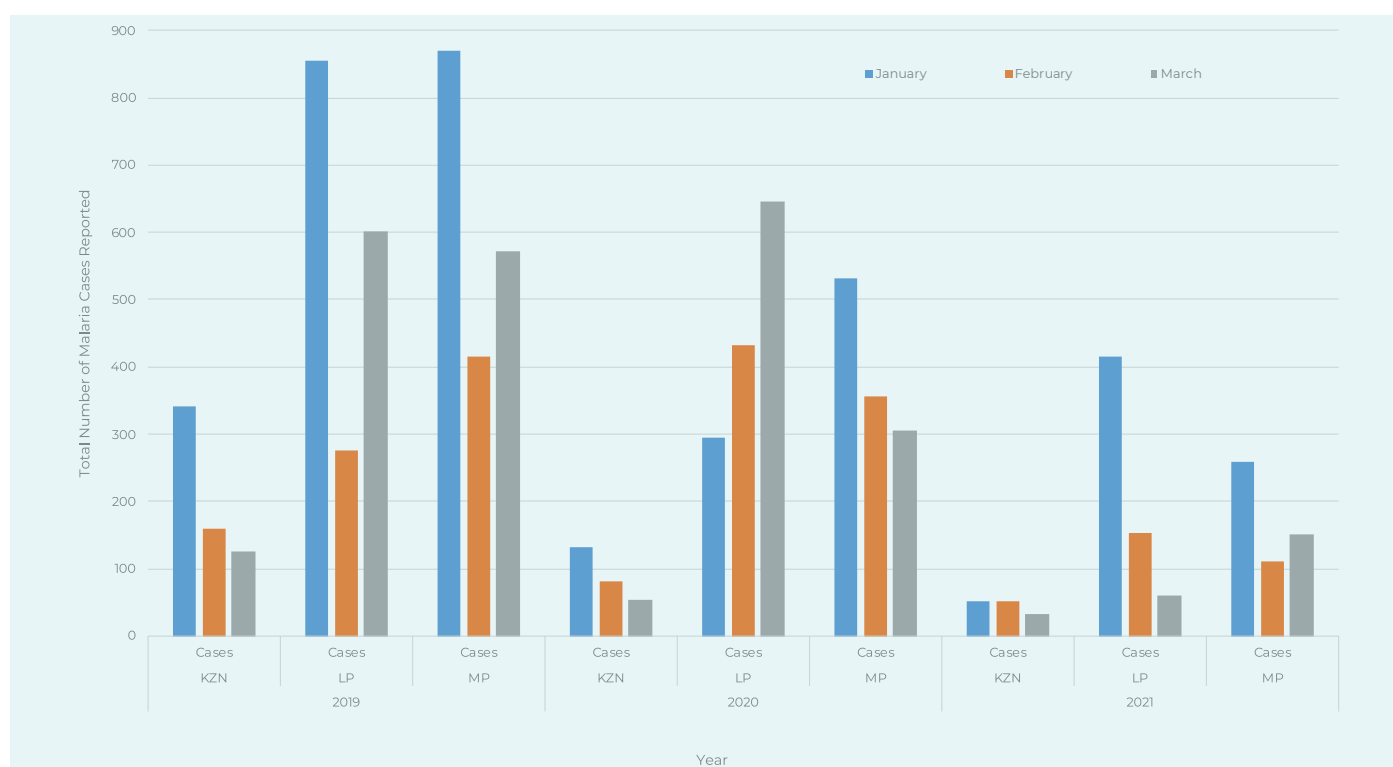


Figure 5. Malaria cases reported by the three malaria-endemic provinces in quarter one of 2019, 2020 and 2021 (source National Department of Health). KZN=KwaZulu-Natal Province, LP=Limpopo Province, MP=Mpumalanga Province.