

Almost half a million children passed away from malaria in 2020

 By [Katja Hamilton](#)

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The World Health Organisation (WHO) has released the annual 2021 Malaria report with some of the key findings highlighting the disruptive impact of Covid-19 on the control of the spread of malaria in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020.



Source: [Pexels](#)

"We have seen a dramatic increase in the number of cases and the number of deaths from malaria in 2020 because of the negative impact that Covid-19 has had," says Sherwin Charles, co-founder of Goodbye Malaria.

The WHO report shows that malaria continues to be a significant health concern for the Africa region. Pre-pandemic, global malaria deaths reduced steadily between 2000 and 2019, from 896,000 in 2000 to 562,000 in 2015 and 558,000 in 2019.

Covid-19 has since thrown a spanner in the works.

"We have seen more than 228 million cases of malaria on the African continent in 2020. Africa made up 95% of the global malaria cases and 96% of all malaria deaths. This means that an estimated 627 000 people in sub-Saharan Africa lost their lives due to malaria last year. This is a 12% increase in the number of deaths compared with 2019," Charles said.

Children have been hardest hit, with 80% of all malaria deaths in the region occurring among children under five.

"Almost half a million children passed away from malaria in 2020," Charles said. This coincides with the 2021 Malaria Report's findings that a child now dies from malaria every minute on the African continent, compared to every two minutes as previously reported, before the pandemic.

Resources diverted

The WHO report indicates that this increase in cases and deaths is due to disruptions in the provision of malaria prevention, diagnosis, and treatment during the Covid pandemic.

The malaria community has seen resources diverted away from the diagnosis and treatment of the disease, because of the Covid pandemic.

"There has been a disruption to the supply chain resulting in a shortage of malaria commodities in the country. There has also been a decrease in people ill from malaria visiting healthcare centres and clinics and seeking treatment," Charles said.

All of these factors have contributed to an increase in both the number of malaria cases and the number of deaths during the Covid pandemic, he said.

An ongoing battle

Charles encouraged African governments and private-sector partners to intensify their efforts to ensure the region does not lose even more ground to this preventable and treatable disease, including strengthening primary health care and increasing domestic and international investment.

"By strengthening health systems, investing in current malaria interventions, and accelerating the development and implementation of new measures, we can once again achieve a rapid decline in malaria deaths and infections, improve countries' resilience against current and future pandemics, and save millions more lives. Doing so will enable us to realise the end of malaria within a generation."

"Zero malaria begins with me"

He reiterated that innovation in new tools is a critical strategy for accelerating progress. "One crucial new prevention tool is RTS,S – the first vaccine ever recommended by the WHO against a human parasite," he said.

"Malaria can be eradicated. Now is the time for us to increase our investment in malaria to ensure our vulnerable populations have access to diagnostics and treatment, and that we are reaching those in the most rural of areas. We can't take our foot off the accelerator as we need to get back on track to meet our ECG goals of malaria eradication in sub Saharan Africa.

"We need to increase our advocacy in our communities to ensure that they believe malaria can be eradicated, to ensure that they take the steps necessary to protect themselves from this dreaded disease.

"We need to get the message out there that "Zero malaria starts with me".

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

Katja is the Finance, Property and Healthcare Editor at Bizcommunity.

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