The entire population of Ghana is at risk of malaria. The annual reported number of malaria cases in 2019 was 6,703,687 with 336 deaths.
Malaria

Sustaining Essential Health Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting an incredible strain on health systems across Africa. Health systems are required to maintain routine health services for other illnesses even as they handle the additional burden. In order to prevent widespread morbidity and mortality, it is of vital importance that we work to sustain the delivery of essential life-saving interventions during this difficult time including for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent health, Neglected Tropical Diseases and malaria.

For Ghana, it was of vital importance to ensure that the planning for the universal coverage campaign for long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) scheduled for 2021 goes ahead, whilst taking into account physical distancing, in accordance with the recent guidance and recommendations from WHO and the RBM partnership to End Malaria. Without this campaign, coupled with the need to also continue to deliver seasonal malaria chemoprevention (SMC), and to sustain essential health services including malaria case management, there would be an increase in malaria cases and deaths. Ghana is congratulated for completing the first three rounds of SMC. Under the worst-case scenario, in which there is a 75% reduction in access to effective antimalarial medicines, WHO estimate that there could be a 19.5% increase in malaria cases, and a 129.4% increase in malaria deaths in Ghana. This scenario would represent a complete reversal in the substantial progress in malaria mortality reductions seen over the last 2 decades.

It is essential to ensure the continuity of malaria, RMNCAH and NTD services in 2021 as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our continent. This may include the implementation of any necessary catch-up activities and ensuring timely planning to account for potential delays in procurement and delivery. Any intervention must ensure the safety of communities and health workers given the ease of transmission of COVID-19.

Progress

Ghana has secured sufficient resources for the essential anti-malarial commodities required to sustain coverage in 2021 and has distributed sufficient numbers of LLINs and carried out IRS sufficient to achieve 100% operational coverage of the targeted at risk population. The country has carried out insecticide resistance monitoring since 2015 and has reported the results to WHO. Ghana has scaled up coverage of iCCM. Ghana has further increased its already high rating in terms of public sector management systems (CPIA cluster D). The country is also showing leadership in malaria control through its participation in the High Burden High Impact approach. Ghana has also launched its Zero Malaria Starts with Me campaign. Ghana has decreased the estimated malaria incidence and mortality rates by more than 40% since 2015.

In line with the legacy agenda of the ALMA chair, His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta, Ghana has significantly enhanced the tracking and accountability mechanisms for malaria with the development of a Malaria Elimination Scorecard and has posted the scorecard to the ALMA Scorecard Knowledge Hub.

Impact

The annual reported number of malaria cases in 2019 was 6,703,687 with 336 deaths.

Key Challenges

- Insecticide resistance threatens vector control effectiveness.
• Sustaining the delivery of essential life-saving interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic including for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Adolescent and Child health, malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases.

**Previous Key Recommended Action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Suggested completion timeframe</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Comments - key activities/accomplishments since last quarterly report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Ensure that malaria services including case management and vector control are sustained and implemented whilst using COVID-19 sensitive guidelines during the pandemic</td>
<td>Q4 2020</td>
<td>The country has adequate stocks of ACTs and RDTs. Planning for the IRS, SMC and LLIN campaigns for 2021 are ongoing</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**RMNCAH and NTDs**

**Progress**

The country has achieved high coverage of tracer RMNCAH interventions, in particular exclusive breastfeeding, DPT3 and postnatal care. Ghana has also recently increased coverage of skilled birth attendants and vitamin A. The country has significantly enhanced the tracking and accountability mechanisms with the development of a Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Scorecard, including with the introduction of community level scorecards.

Progress in addressing Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Ghana is measured using a composite index calculated from preventative chemotherapy coverage achieved for lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, soil transmitted helminths and trachoma. Ghana has achieved high for trachoma (100%), schistomiasis (91%), onchocerciasis (86%) and lymphatic filariasis (73%); and, lower coverage for soil-transmitted helminths (47%). Overall, the NTD preventative chemotherapy coverage index for Ghana in 2019 is 73, which represents a very substantial increase compared with the 2018 index value (42).
## Previous Key Recommended Actions

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<tr>
<td><strong>RMNCAH</strong>&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;: Impact</td>
<td>Ensure that essential RMNCAH services are sustained and implemented whilst using Covid-19 sensitive guidelines during the pandemic. Address any stock-outs of essential RMNCAH commodities</td>
<td>Q4 2020</td>
<td>Ghana reports there have been reductions in RMNCAH services for ANC, PNC and EPI during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the national aggregate of ANC4 visits decreased from 78% in Q1 2020 to 69% in Q4 2020. Many staff responsible for providing RMNCAH services have been re-assigned to support the COVID-19 response, especially at the primary care level. In addition, fears of becoming infected with COVID have increased among communities, making them reluctant to access services. To mitigate for the impact on RMNCAH services, Ghana has adopted COVID-19 protocols and guidelines for pediatric and obstetric care. The guidelines establish special arrangements for COVID-19 prevention and service delivery in the context of COVID-19 with key messages for service providers and communities. The guidelines aim to enhance trust in the capacity of the health system and ensure appropriate care-seeking behaviour. The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the regular in-flow of essential commodities to render effective RMNCAH services at the service delivery point. Compliance with Last Mile Distribution protocol remains a challenge which has contributed to the erratic shortage of medicines at the health facilities. Ghana’s community scorecard is also showing that a majority of clients have reported given a low score to health facilities on the indicator related to medicine availability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NTDs</strong></td>
<td>Ensure that NTD interventions including Mass Drug Administration, vector control and Morbidity Management and Disability Prevention are sustained and implemented whilst using Covid-19 sensitive guidelines during the pandemic. This includes prioritising key necessary catch up activities</td>
<td>Q4 2021</td>
<td>Deliverable not yet due</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Ghana has responded positively to the RMNCAH recommended action addressing the

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<sup>1</sup> RMNCAH metrics, recommended actions and response tracked through WHO
low coverage of ARTs in the general population and in children, with recent increases reported, and continues to track progress as these actions are implemented.

Key
- Green: Action achieved
- Yellow: Some progress
- Red: No progress
- Gray: Deliverable not yet due