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**PRESS RELEASE**

**25 April 2018**

**BEWARE OF MALARIA EVEN IN WINTER**

*Malaria cases may be increasing in winter months due to more favourable conditions*

Malaria transmission in South Africa is seasonal and the months of September to May are considered to be malaria- or high season. The summer rains during the first quarter of the year brings with it an increase in the number of malaria cases and malaria transmission is at its highest during the warmer and wetter months of November through to April with a peak in January and February.

Towards May, a decrease in malaria cases occurs due to less favourable environmental conditions for the mosquitoes, and the risk of contracting malaria between June and end August (low season a.k.a. winter) are lower. Importantly LOW risk does not mean NO risk.

An increase in the number of reported malaria cases has been noted in the low season of 2017 when compared to the low season in 2016. Between June and August 2016 there were a reported 794 cases versus 2238 cases over that same period in 2017. The amount of rainfall impacts on the number of cases, with higher rainfall allowing for an increase in case numbers. This, along with warmer temperatures experienced, could potentially be the reason for the increase in the number of cases in the winter of 2017. A change in the climate, such as the temperature and rainfall patterns could be creating the perfect conditions for mosquitoes to continue breeding, even in the supposedly colder months.

Malaria is a parasitic disease, which is transmitted by mosquito vectors of the Anopheles genus. In South Africa the malaria risk or endemic areas are the north-eastern parts of Limpopo Province with the higher risk closer to the Limpopo River Valley, lowveld areas of Mpumalanga Province including the Kruger National Park (KNP) and the far north parts of KwaZulu-Natal Province bordering Mozambique. Residents and travellers/tourists to malaria-risk areas, including holiday destinations such as the KNP and Mozambique, must remain vigilant regarding malaria and make use of anti-mosquito measures to avoid being bitten.

Commonly misdiagnosed as flu, which is more common during winter time, malaria presents itself as bouts of fever accompanied by cold or flu-like symptoms, alternating with periods of absence of feeling sick. Intermittent symptoms include headache, malaise, fatigue, nausea, muscular pains, chills and even diarrhoea.

People in endemic areas or those who have recently visited such an area should consult a physician or healthcare practitioner immediately when these symptoms appear and does not dissipate. Malaria treatment is highly effective if administered during the early stages of the disease.

The theme for World Malaria Day 2018 is “Ready to beat Malaria”. People need to be made aware of the disease in order to protect themselves, even if they do not live in an endemic area. Prevention is better than cure and when living in or traveling to a malaria area consider the following to avoid being bitten (also useful for non-malaria mosquitoes): Avoid going out between dusk and dawn when Anopheles mosquitoes usually feed; wear long-sleeved clothing if going out at night; avoid wearing dark colours because they attract mosquitoes; apply DEET-containing insect repellent to exposed skin; use screens over windows and doors; use anti-mosquito sprays or insecticide dispensers, or burn mosquito coils at night and; sleep under bed nets if available.

Researchers at the University of Pretoria Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control (UP ISMC) do research on the malaria vectors, parasites and human health. They have a trans-disciplinary approach towards malaria control and eventual elimination, with a strong focus on new innovations for malaria prevention. The UP ISMC released a mobile application (app), ‘Malaria Buddy’, in collaboration with Travel with Flair (TWF). The app is continuously being updated with the aim to make the app an all-encompassing malaria information tool. The app is available to download on the iTunes store for iOS devices and Google play for Android devices. More information on malaria is available on the Frequently Asked Questions page ([FAQs](http://www.up.ac.za/en/up-centre-for-sustainable-malaria-control/article/2243486/malaria-frequently-asked-questions)) of the UP ISMC website ([www.malaria.up.ac.za](http://www.malaria.up.ac.za)).

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