iAHO Integrated African Health Observatory

World Health Organization African Region

75 HEALTH FOR ALL

Analytical Fact Sheet

February 2024

DAK Team

What are the leading diseases in the African Region?

Rationale

By monitoring the annual number of cases and deaths of disease, health systems can be adapted to respond effectively, triggering responses in many sectors (transport, food and agriculture, mental health care, etc.). Understanding why people suffer can help to understand how they live, improve health services, reduce preventable diseases in all countries and respond effectively to changing epidemiological situations. This fact sheet provides key information on morbidity trends in the African region. Most of the data used in this fact sheet comes from the latest (2019) available edition of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's (IHME) Global Burden of Disease (GBD). With Covid-19 having had an impact on all countries since 2020, the real situation should be different, but while we await new data at global level, the major trends remain latest in many contexts and can therefore be used to adapt our decision-making processes. It is also a call for the Region to pool its efforts to generate more recent comprehensive data on morbidity, using all available sources.

Key messages

- The number of new disease cases in the African Region has risen over the past two decades, from about 4.07 billion in 2000 to 6.39 billion in 2019 (an increase of 57%).
- In 2019, more than 4 out of every ten new disease cases were recorded in people aged 14 years and under in the African Region.
- According to the latest data (2019), the most recurrent diseases in the African Region were upper respiratory infections, followed by diarrheal diseases and oral diseases (37.45%, 19.11% and 10.29% of all cases, respectively).
- Infectious diseases and maternal, perinatal, and nutritional conditions remained the most common in the African Region in 2019 (about 4.39 billion cases).
- From the start of the outbreak in 2020 to January 2024, about 9.5 million cases of COVID-19 were reported to WHO in the African Region.
- WHO calls on Member States to address health equity through universal health coverage so that all children can access essential health services without undue financial hardship.
- Improving maternal health is one of WHO's key priorities. WHO contributes to reducing maternal mortality by increasing research evidence, providing evidence-based clinical and programmatic guidance, setting global standards, and providing technical support to Member States in developing and implementing effective policies and programmes.

1. Trends in new cases of disease or condition in the African Region

The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study provides a comprehensive picture of disability across countries, time, age and gender. It quantifies the loss of health due to hundreds of diseases, injuries and risk factors so that health systems can be improved, and disparities reduced. It provides key information on trends in morbidity to support informed decision-making on health policy and resource allocation. These estimates are produced using data from a vast network of scientists, government officials, medical professionals, and other research organizations, primary and secondary data collection, censuses, household interviews, medical record reviews, verbal autopsies, and biometric data collected during household and health facility observations and interviews.

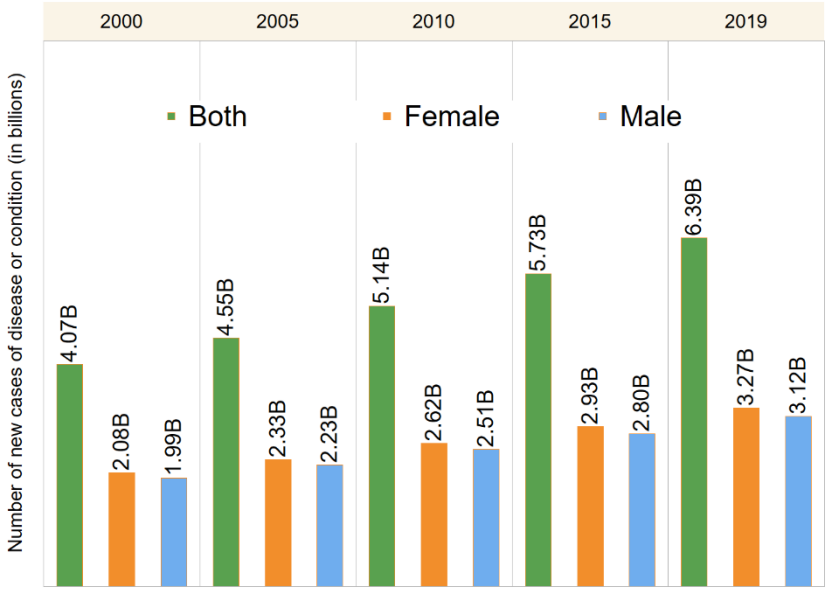

Figure 1: Trends in new cases of disease and injury in the African Region, 2000-2019 (Source: IHME)

- The number of new disease cases in the African Region has risen over the past two decades, from about 4.07 billion in 2000 to 6.39 billion in 2019 (an increase of 57%).
- In the African Region, men appear to have fewer disease cases than women (according to the latest data, Figure 1).

Figure 2: Distribution of new cases of disease and injury (%) by age group and sex in the African Region, 2019 (Source: IHME)

- According to the most recent data (2019), in the African Region, the highest number of disease cases was recorded in the 5-14 age group (more than 24% of all new cases).
- In the African Region, the lowest incidence was in the 0-6- and 7-27-day groups (0.1% and 0.3% of all new cases, respectively).
- In 2019, more than 4 out of every ten new disease cases were recorded in people aged 14 years and under in the African Region.

2. New cases of disease, injury and risk factor

Causes of disease and disability can be grouped into three broad categories: communicable (infectious diseases and maternal, perinatal and nutritional conditions), non-communicable (chronic diseases) and injuries.

2000				2019			
Rank	Diseases and conditions	New cases (in millions)	% of all new cases	Rank	Diseases and conditions	New cases (in millions)	% of all new cases
0	All causes	4,287	100	0	All causes	6,587	100
1	Upper respiratory infections	1,529	35.67	1	Upper respiratory infections	2,466	37.45
2	Diarrheal diseases	761	17.76	2	Diarrheal diseases	1,258	19.11
3	Oral disorders	410	9.56	3	Oral disorders	677	10.29
4	Fungal skin diseases	216	5.03	4	Fungal skin diseases	347	5.27
5	Vitamin A deficiency	214	4.99	5	Malaria	208	3.15
6	Malaria	209	4.89	6	Bacterial skin diseases	197	3.01
7	Bacterial skin diseases	121	2.83	7	Vitamin A deficiency	195	2.96
8	Sexually transmitted infections excluding HIV	86	2.01	8	Sexually transmitted infections excluding HIV	142	2.16
9	Gynecological diseases	74	1.74	9	Gynecological diseases	132	2.01
10	Lower respiratory infections	62	1.44	10	Headache disorders	97	1.47
11	Headache disorders	57	1.34	11	Otitis media	74	1.12
12	Otitis media	49	1.15	12	Lower respiratory infections	72	1.11
13	Acute hepatitis	47	1.11	13	Other skin and subcutaneous diseases	65	0.99
14	Other skin and subcutaneous diseases	38	0.88	14	Acute hepatitis	64	0.97
15	Dermatitis	31	0.72	15	Dermatitis	53	0.81
16	Scabies	29	0.69	16	Scabies	45	0.69
17	Depressive disorders	26	0.61	17	Urinary diseases and male infertility	42	0.63
18	Maternal disorders	24	0.58	18	Depressive disorders	41	0.63
19	Urinary diseases and male infertility	24	0.56	19	Upper digestive system diseases	39	0.59
20	Upper digestive system diseases	22	0.52	20	Maternal disorders	32	0.49

The red line indicates that the rank has increased; the green line indicates that the rank has decreased.

Figure 3: Top 20 diseases and conditions (all ages and both sexes) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)

- According to the latest data (2019), the most recurrent diseases in the African Region were upper respiratory infections, followed by diarrheal diseases and oral diseases (37.45%, 19.11% and 10.29% of all cases, respectively).
- Vitamin A deficiency moved down from 5th most common disease in the African Region in 2000 (with about 214 million cases, 4.99% of all diseases) to 7th in 2019 (with about 195 million cases, 2.96% of all diseases).
- Lower respiratory infections were the 10th most common disease in the African Region in 2000 (with about 62 million cases, 1.44% of all diseases) and the 12th in 2019 (with about 72 million cases, 1.11% of all diseases).
- Acute hepatitis passed from the 13th most common disease in the African Region in 2000 (with about 47 million cases, 1.11% of all diseases) to the 14th in 2019 (with about 64 million cases, 0.97% of all diseases).

2.1 **Common diseases**

- Infectious diseases and maternal, perinatal, and nutritional conditions remained the most common in the African Region in 2019 (about 4.39 billion cases).
- The number of cases of communicable, maternal, perinatal and nutritional diseases has increased dramatically from about 2.84 billion cases in 2000 to about 4.39 billion cases in 2019 (an increase of 54.5%).
- On the other hand, cases of non-communicable diseases increased from about 1.16 billion cases in 2000 to 1.92 billion cases in 2019 (an increase of 65.5%).

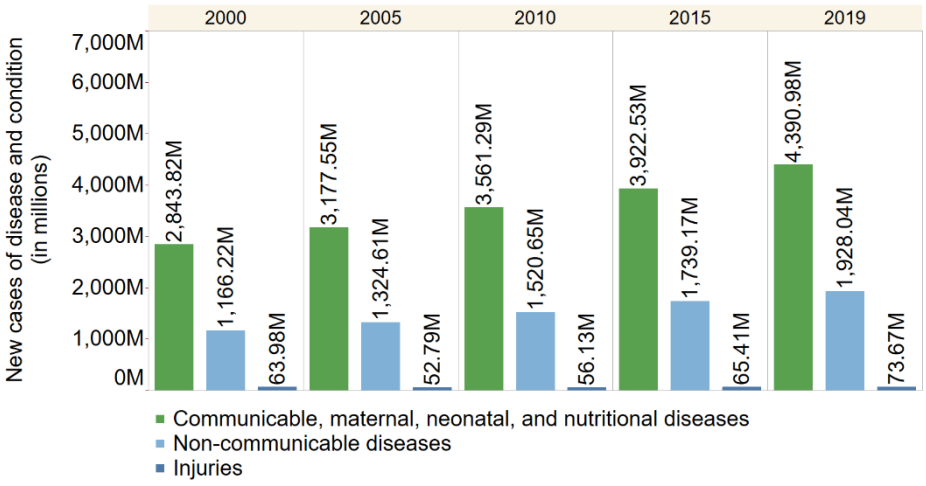

Figure 4: Trend in new cases of diseases or conditions by broader cause in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)

2.2 **Diseases occurring in those aged 0-28 days**

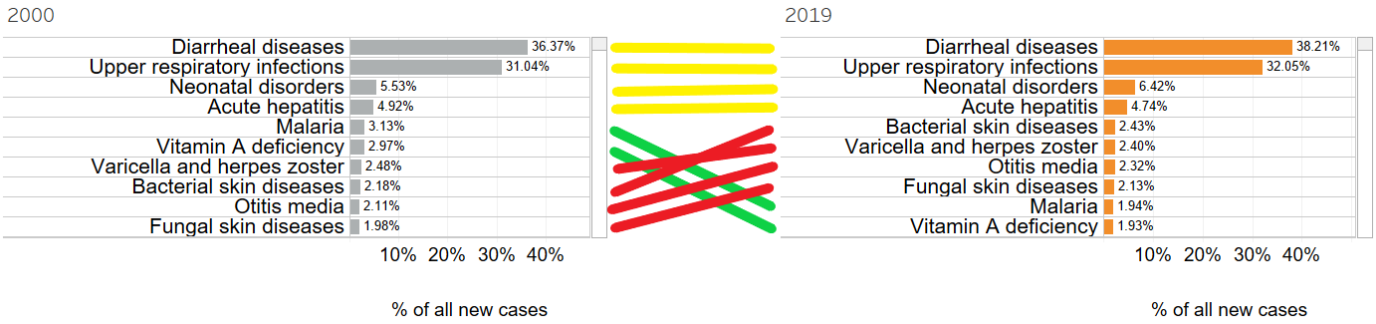

Figure 5: *Top 10 new cases of diseases in the 0-28 days age group (% of all cases) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)*

The yellow line indicates that the rank has not changed.

- According to the most recent data, more than 24.1 million newborn disease cases were recorded in the African Region in 2019 (about 0.4 per cent of all cases).
- Diarrhoea (about 38.21% of neonatal cases) was the leading cause of neonatal illness in the African Region in 2019, followed by upper respiratory tract infections (about 32.05% of neonatal cases) and neonatal disorders (about 6.42% of cases).
- Malaria moved from 5th to 9th most common disease in newborns between 2000 and 2019.
- On the other hand, vitamin A deficiency moved from the 6th to the 10th most common disease in newborns between 2000 and 2019. It decreased from 2.97% to 1.93% in neonatal diseases between 2000 and 2019.

2.3 **Diseases occurring in those aged 28-364 days**

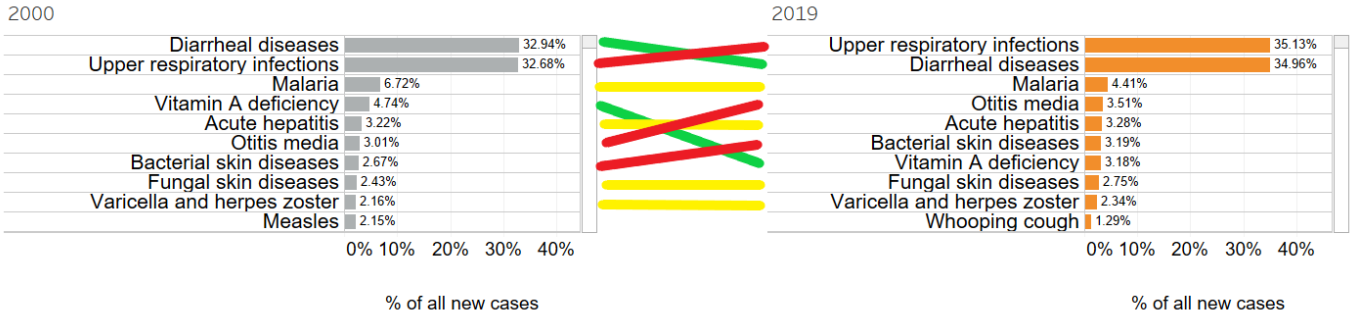

***Figure 6**: Top 10 new cases of diseases in the 28-364 days age group (% of all cases) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)*

- More than 257.5 million cases were recorded in the African Region's 28-364-days age group in 2019 (about 4% of all cases).
- Upper respiratory infections (35.13% of all cases) were the most common disease in the 28-364 days age group in the African Region in 2019, followed by diarrheal diseases (34.96% of all cases) and malaria (about 4.41% of all cases).
- Diarrheal diseases dropped from the 1st to the 2nd most common disease in children aged 28-364 days between 2000 and 2019.
- Vitamin A deficiency was the 4th most common disease in children aged 28-364 days in 2000. In 2019, it was the 7th most common disease.

2.**4 Cases of diseases in the age group 1-4 years**

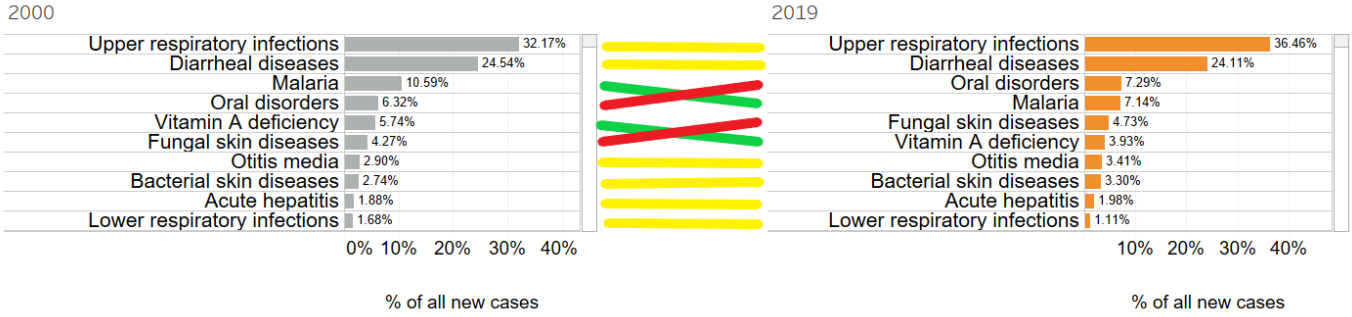

***Figure 7**: Top 10 new cases of diseases in the age group 1-4 years (% of all cases) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)*

- In 2019, over 943 million cases were recorded among children aged 1-4 in the African Region (about 14% of all cases).
- Upper respiratory infections (36.46% of all cases) were the most common disease in the 1-4 years age group in the African Region in 2019, followed by diarrheal diseases (24.11% of all cases) and oral disorders (about 7.29% of all cases).
- Malaria dropped from the 3rd to the 4th most common disease in children aged 1-4 years between 2000 and 2019

2.5 **Cases of diseases in the age group 5-14 years**

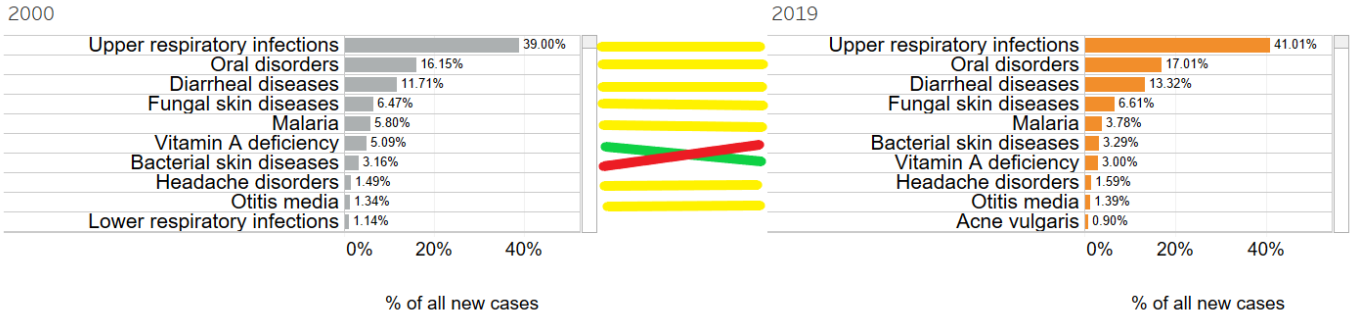

***Figure 8**: Top 10 new cases of diseases in the age group 5-14 years (% of all cases) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)*

- In 2019, over 1.6 billion cases were recorded among children aged 5-14 in the African Region (about 24% of all cases).
- Upper respiratory infections (41.01% of all cases) were the most common disease in the 5-14 years age group in the African Region in 2019, followed by oral disorders (17.01% of all cases) and diarrheal diseases (about 13.32% of all cases).
- Vitamin A deficiency dropped from the 6th to the 7th most common disease in children aged 5-14 years between 2000 and 2019.

2.6 **Cases of diseases in the age group 15-49 years**

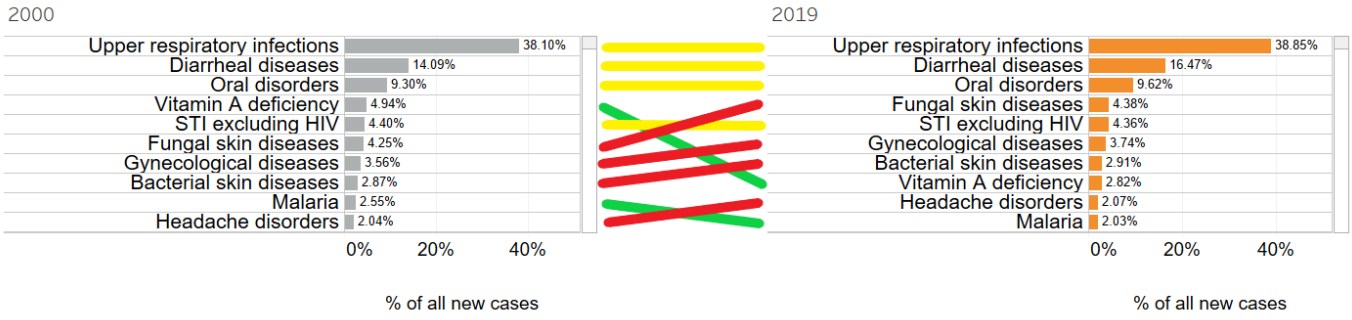

***Figure 9**: Top 10 new cases of diseases in the age group15-49 years (% of all cases) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)*

- In 2019, over 2.86 billion cases were recorded among people aged 15-49 in the African Region (about 45% of all cases).
- Upper respiratory infections (38.85% of all cases) were the most common disease in the 15-49 years age group in the African Region in 2019, followed by diarrheal diseases (16.47% of all cases) and oral disorders (about 9.62% of all cases).
- Vitamin A deficiency dropped from the 4th to the 8th most common disease in children aged 15-49 between 2000 and 2019.

2.7 **Cases of diseases in the age group 50-69 years**

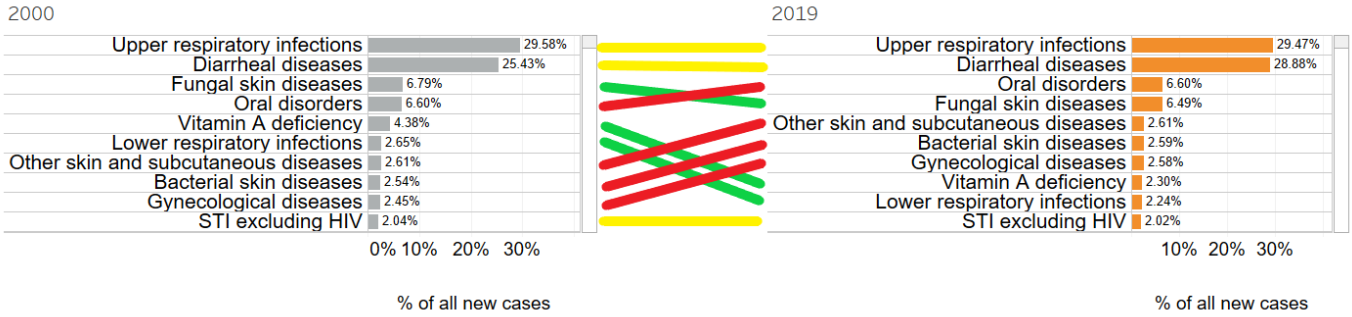

***Figure 10**: Top 10 new cases of diseases in the age group 50-69 years (% of all cases) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)*

- In 2019, over 504 million cases were recorded among people aged 50-69 in the African Region (about 8% of all cases).
- Upper respiratory infections (29.47% of all cases) were the most common disease in the 50-69 years age group in the African Region in 2019, followed by diarrheal diseases (28.88% of all cases) and oral disorders (about 6.60% of all cases).
- Fungal skin diseases dropped from the 3rd to the 4th most common disease in children aged 50-69 between 2000 and 2019.

2.8 **Cases of diseases in the age group 70+ years**

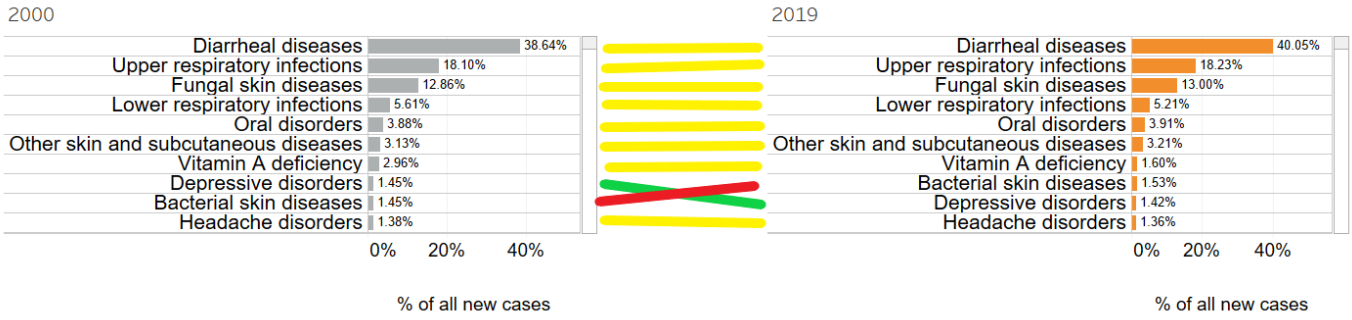

***Figure 11**: Top 10 new cases of diseases in the age group 70+ years (% of all cases) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)*

- In 2019, over 156 million cases were recorded among people aged 70 and older in the African Region (about 2.5% of all cases).
- Diarrheal diseases (40.05% of cases) were the most common disease in the 70 years and older age group in the African Region in 2019, followed by upper respiratory infections (18.23% of cases) and fungal skin diseases (about 13% of cases).
- Depressive disorders dropped from the 8th to the 9th most common disease in people aged 70 years and more between 2000 and 2019.

2.9 **Top 1 disease by age group**

Table 1: *Top disease by age group (% of new cases) in the African Region, 2000 and 2019 (Source: IHME)*

Age group	2000	2019
0-28 days	Diarrheal diseases (36.37%)	Diarrheal diseases (38.21%)
28-364 days	Diarrheal diseases (32.94%)	Upper respiratory infections (34.96%)
1-4 years	Upper respiratory infections (32.17%)	Upper respiratory infections (36.46%)
5-14 years	Upper respiratory infections (39.00%)	Upper respiratory infections (41.01%)
15-49 years	Upper respiratory infections (38.10%)	Upper respiratory infections (38.85%)
50-69 years	Upper respiratory infections (29.58%)	Upper respiratory infections (29.47%)
70+ years	Diarrheal diseases (38.64%)	Diarrheal diseases (40.05%)

- Upper respiratory infections are the leading cause of illness in all age groups in the African Region, except for children aged 0-28 days and people aged 70 years and over.
- In the 5–14-year age group, upper respiratory infections accounted for more than 40% of new cases.

3. New cases COVID-19 morbidity in Africa (2020-2023)

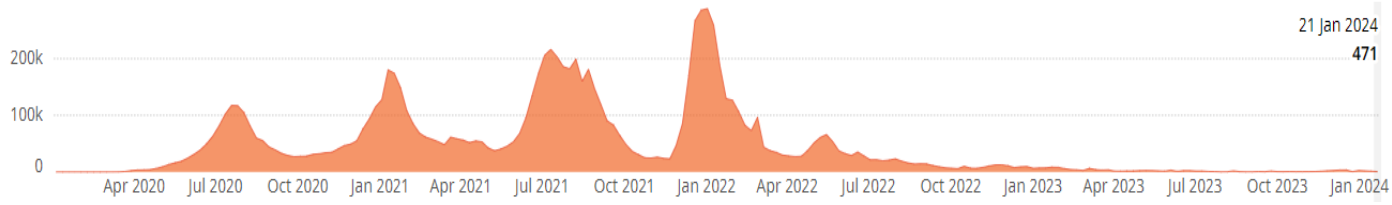

Figure 12: *Trend in the number of weekly COVID-19 cases reported in the African Region, 2020-2024 (Source: WHO)*

- Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. According to WHO, the trend in COVID-19 cases in the African Region peaked from 26 December 2021 to 2 January 2022 (about 288,300 cases).
- COVID-19 cases reached around 5.19 million in 2021 and fell sharply to around 1.9 million in 2022 in the African Region.
- In the WHO African Region, about 117 079 cases of COVID-19 were reported in 2023.
- From the start of the outbreak in 2020 to January 2024, about 9.5 million cases of COVID-19 were reported to WHO in the African Region.
- The excess mortality linked to Covid-19 has not affected Africa in the same way as other regions.

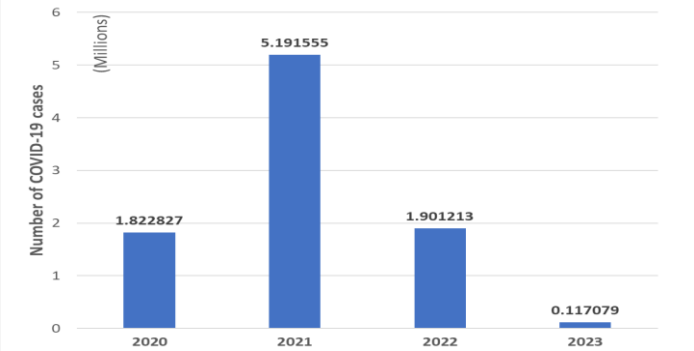

Figure 13: *Trend in the number of COVID-19 cases reported by year in the African Region, 2020-2023 (Source: WHO)*

Country Top 10 new cases of diseases

Annex.docx

4. WHO response to preventable child and maternal deaths

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 were developed to promote healthy lives and well-being for all children. SDG Goal 3.2.1 is to end preventable deaths of newborns and under-5 children by 2030. There are two targets:

1. Reduce newborn mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1000 live births in every country and
2. Reduce under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1000 live births in every country.

Target 3.2.1 is closely linked with target 3.1.1, to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births, and target 2.2.1 on ending all forms of malnutrition, as malnutrition is a frequent cause of death for under-5 children. These have been translated into the new Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent Health, which calls for ending preventable child deaths while addressing emerging child health priorities. Member States must set their targets, develop specific strategies to reduce child mortality and monitor their progress towards the reduction.

WHO calls on Member States to address health equity through Universal Health Coverage (UHC) so that all children can access essential health services without undue financial hardship. Moving from business as usual to innovative, multiple, and tailored approaches to increase access, coverage, and quality of child health services will require strategic direction and an optimal mix of community and facility-based care. Health sector and multisectoral efforts are also needed to overcome health inequalities and social determinants.

Improving maternal health is one of WHO's key priorities. WHO contributes to reducing maternal mortality by increasing research evidence, providing evidence-based clinical and programmatic guidance, setting global standards, and providing technical support to Member States in developing and implementing effective policies and programmes.

As defined in the Strategies toward Ending Preventable Maternal Mortality (EPMM): a renewed focus for improving maternal and newborn health and well-being, WHO is working with partners in supporting countries towards:

- Addressing inequalities in access to and quality of reproductive, maternal and newborn health care services.
- Ensuring universal health coverage for comprehensive reproductive, maternal and newborn health care.
- Addressing all causes of maternal mortality, reproductive and maternal morbidities, and related disabilities.
- Strengthening health systems to collect high-quality data to respond to the needs and priorities of women and girls, and
- Ensuring accountability to improve quality of care and equity.

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Sources

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