

Driven to End Malaria: The Power of Community Engagement & Behaviour Change

Dr Taneshka Kruger

22 April 2026 ~ World Malaria Day webinar



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Make today matter

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WMD 2026 theme

Driven to End Malaria: Now We Can, Now We Must

- We have the tools to eliminate malaria
- We have the knowledge to eliminate malaria
- We have prevention and treatment methods...
- Yet malaria persists in many communities
- WHY?



THE A,B,C,D OF MALARIA PREVENTION



A

AWARENESS

Be **AWARE** of the risk and symptoms



B

BITE PREVENTION

Avoid being **BITTEN** by mosquitoes
(from dusk till dawn)



C

CHEMOPROPHYLAXIS

Take **CHEMOPROPHYLAXIS**
(antimalarial medication) if prescribed



D

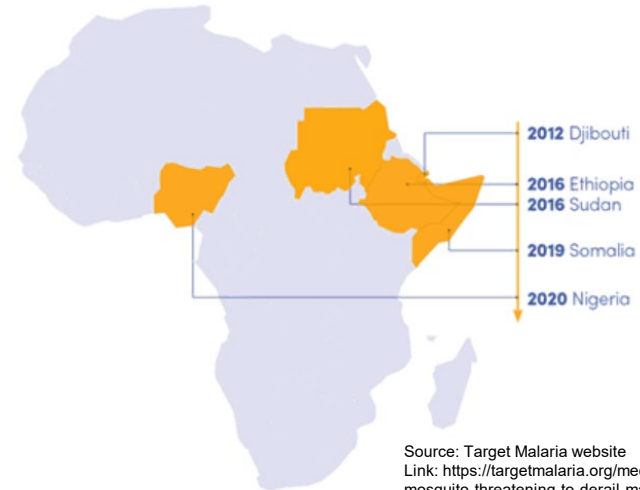
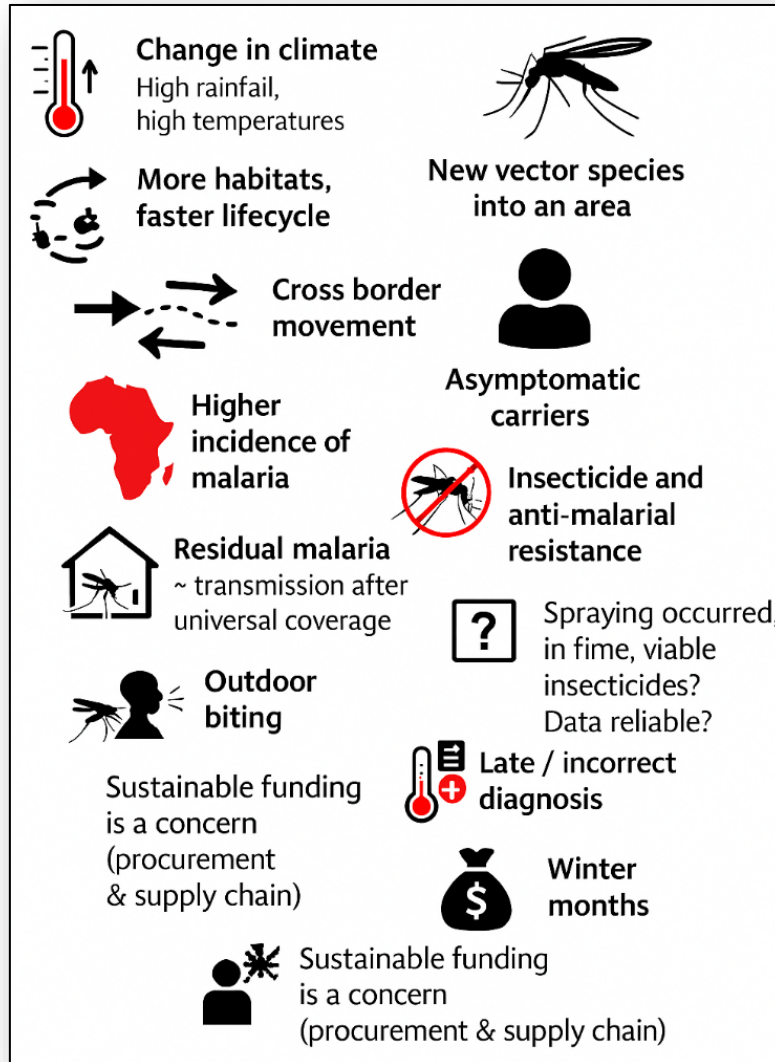
DIAGNOSIS

Early **DIAGNOSIS** and Rapid Treatment



Challenges to reach malaria elimination

A combination of factors...



- *Anopheles stephensi*
- Parasite resistance to ACT drugs
- Vector resistance to insecticides
- *P. falciparum* ability to evade RDT detection
- Change in mosquito-biting behaviour
- Impact of climate change
- Funding



The missing link

But malaria elimination is not only biomedical; it is behavioural and social!

- Malaria continues because of gaps:
 - Access to treatment gaps
 - Behaviour gaps
 - Trust gaps



Accessed:21 April 2026
<https://medcitynews.com/2025/01/how-personalized-daily-rewards-close-care-gaps/>

Success depends on how people behave and how communities function

- *Behavioural:*
People must seek care, get tested, complete treatment, use prevention measures, etc.
- *Social:*
Culture, beliefs, education, trust in healthcare, and community norms influence behaviours

People must use tools correctly and communities must support actions



Role of healthcare workers

Why community engagement?

- Because behaviour determines impact
- How to change behaviour = engage with and educate the people
- Community engagement is how this is done

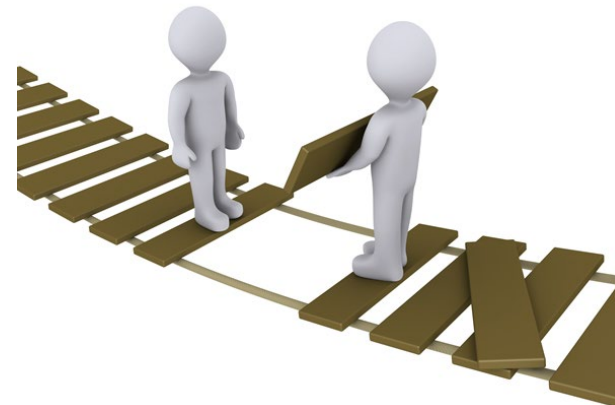


Accessed:21 April 2026
<https://midyafricaschool.com/courses/fro-nt-end-web-development-course-africa/>

Healthcare workers are the bridge between the health system and community

They play a critical role as:

- Trusted source of information
- First point of contact
- Trusted voice
- Influencers of behaviour



Accessed:21 April 2026
<https://theavarnagroup.com/a-guide-to-building-dei-bridges/>

Not just providers but change agents



Early care seeking behaviour

Early diagnosis = lives saved and reduced transmission

Why do people delay?

- Misinterpreting symptoms (“just flu”)
- Distance and cost
- Cultural beliefs
- Lack of urgency

Messages should stay simple:
Fever? Test for malaria within 24 hours.



Accessed:21 April 2026
<https://www.taylorintime.com/do-not-confuse-procrastination-with-delay/>

Understanding barriers = first step to changing behaviour

Gauteng 2026 as a case study



Case study: Malaria cases – Gauteng 2026

- Malaria cases and deaths doubled in Gauteng (2026)
- Linked to travel, delayed care-seeking, and seasonal movement?
- Increased risk during holidays and after flooding
- Preventable, yet still happening

NEWS SOUTH AFRICA

Gauteng faces alarming malaria outbreak with 414 cases and 11 deaths in three months

Wendy Dondolo | Published 1 day ago

f X in W ↗ 1min



Records 414 malaria cases and 11 deaths in just three months. *Wendy Dondolo/Jimmy Chan*

Gauteng Health warns over spike in malaria cases, deaths

© Updated April 20, 2026, 7:43 a.m. | By Faith Modise

The Gauteng Department of Health has warned of a sharp increase in malaria infections and deaths across the province.



Gauteng Health officials sound alarm as malaria cases and deaths double

Johannesburg

PM Puleng Maake
19 April 2026 | 11:45

The Gauteng Department of Health reports that 414 cases and 11 deaths were recorded between January and March this year.

Gauteng Gauteng Department of Health Malaria



Contributing factor

- Heavy rainfall and flooding across SADC, including Mozambique and South Africa
- Increased mosquito breeding and transmission conditions
- Aligned with the seasonal travel

UP ISMC did:

- Press release – 5 February 2026
- Conversation article – 1 March 2025
- Media interviews

Prof. Tiaan de Jager • 1st
 Director: University of Pretoria Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control; Former De...
 1mo •

Severe rainfall and widespread flooding across parts of South Africa, particularly in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, have created conditions conducive to malaria transmission, raising significant public health concerns. Efforts focused on research, innovation, and education are crucial for malaria elimination. The University of Pretoria Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control (UP ISMC) is supporting Government, dedicated to these efforts, and working towards a future free from malaria.
https://lnkd.in/d/Ynt_kZi
[#HSUP](#) [#UPISMC](#) [#malaria](#)



Faculty of Health Sciences - University of Pretoria
 March 10 at 12:23 PM

In case you missed it: Dr. Taneshka Kruger from the Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control at the University of Pretoria spoke to Newroom Afrika about how flooding in southern Africa may lead to a surge in malaria infections and what can be done to protect vulnerable communities. [#UniversityOfPretoria](#) [#MakeTodayMatter](#)

Prof. Tiaan de Jager reposted this

Medicines for Malaria Venture
 24,991 followers
 6d •

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Floods don't just destroy infrastructure; they create disease landscapes.

Across parts of southern Africa this year, heavy rains and flooding ...more

THE CONVERSATION
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When floods hit, the risk of malaria follows: how disaster systems can prepare better

Published: March 1, 2026 6:56am SAST

A yard submerged with flood water from the Limpopo river on 5 February 2026 in Xai Xai, Mozambique. Zinyange Auntony/Getty Images

When floods sweep through southern Africa, the most visible damage is **immediate**: homes washed away, crops destroyed, clinics disrupted, families displaced. These images dominate headlines and humanitarian appeals.

But as floodwaters recede, a quieter, slower-moving crisis often follows – in those same communities that are already struggling to recover.

Authors

Tiaan de Jager
 Director: UP Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control,
 University of Pretoria

Taneshka Kruger
 UP ISMC Project Manager and Coordinator,
 University of Pretoria



Malaria Risk – UP Experts Ready to Support Government Programmes

Recent flooding across Southern Africa raises malaria risk – UP experts ready to support government programmes

Posted on February 05, 2026

Severe flooding across Southern Africa is increasing the risk of malaria transmission. UP experts warn that stagnant floodwaters create ideal breeding sites for Anopheles mosquitoes. Early awareness saves

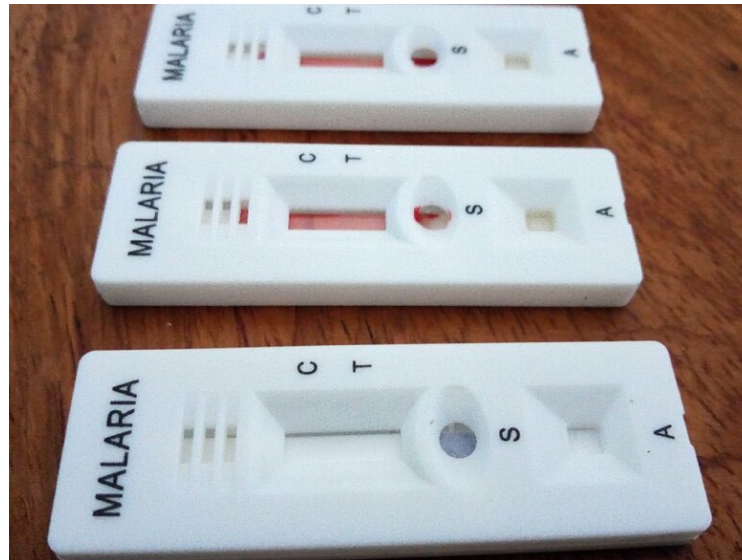
Estimated Reading Time
 3 minutes



What can health care workers do?

- Encourage testing within 24 hours of fever
- Reinforce testing early
- Fever = test for malaria
- Educate during every patient interaction
- Use simple messages

Test before you treat AND treat immediately when positive



Accessed: 21 April 2026
<https://www.evidence4health.org/publications-multimedia/update-adding-rapid-diagnostic-tests-to-community%E2%80%90based-programmes-for.html>



Case management = Behaviour change

- Patients stop treatment early
- Medication misuse happens
- Every treated case matters = prevents more cases

Case management usually includes:

- Early diagnosis (testing promptly when malaria is suspected)
- Prompt and effective treatment once confirmed
- Correct use of medicines (right drug, dose, and duration)
- Patient support and counselling to ensure adherence and understanding
- Follow-up when needed to confirm recovery or detect complications

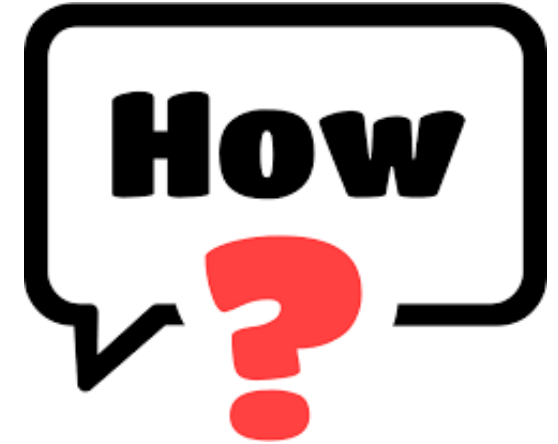
Case management = making sure every malaria case is correctly diagnosed, properly treated, and fully completed



Strengthening case management

How?

- Explain full treatment importance
- Confirm patient understanding
- Build trust with patients



If patients understand 'why', they are more likely to comply



Community awareness strategies

How to reach communities:

- Community dialogues
 - School engagement
 - Radio programmes
 - Social media
 - Direct through community health workers
-
- **Our provincial programmes are doing the above**



Accessed:21 April 2026
<https://thecleanstart.com/reaching-out-to-our-community-a-covid-19-scare/>

Thus **local relevance and accessibility is NB!**



What works best?

Messages:

- Local language
- Cultural relevance
- Repetition of messages
- Engagement over information



Tailor your method based on your audience!

Make messages memorable

- Use storytelling
- Use relatable, real-life examples
- Make it interactive and participatory
- Move from information to experience

People don't act on what they hear, but on what they remember

- So make it relatable
- Make it engaging
- Make it stick



Considerations...



DOs

- Tailor messages to your “audience”
- Check understanding
- Use existing tools and proven approaches
- Adapt creatively to context – make education engaging and human
- Work with teams and partners
- Support behaviour change, not just awareness



DON'Ts

- Assume only “high-risk” or endemic communities are affected
- Assume people already understand malaria or prevention correctly
- Reinvent messages and materials unnecessarily
- Rely only on formal or one-way communication
- Work in isolation



“A picture is worth a 1000 words”



Myths & Misconceptions

Some common myths:

- Malaria is caused by dirty water
- It's just flu
- Traditional remedies are sufficient
- Malaria is no longer a threat
- Malaria isn't fatal
- One minute/ hour/ day in a high-risk area is safe

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Short malaria facts: Debunking myths and misconceptions

Posted on April 25, 2024

Malaria is a mosquito-borne disease that still has many myths, lies, and misconceptions about it. This short article debunks five of the most common ones that people in endemic and non-endemic areas must know.

Myth 1: Malaria isn't fatal

No! The truth is malaria can be fatal. Not every case of malaria is fatal, of course, in fact, the majority of cases are not, if treated in time, but malaria can kill. Early diagnosis and rapid treatment are important.

Myth 2: Malaria is contagious or ingested

No! Malaria is not contagious and does not spread like the flu or cold, it cannot be sexually transmitted, and it is not ingested through the food or water we consume. Malaria is transmitted through an infected female Anopheles mosquito bite. Only females bite, because they need the protein in the blood for egg development.

Two other ways to get infected is through blood transfusion or organ transplantation from a patient with malaria.

Myth 3: Once sick, you become immune

Estimated Reading Time
2 minutes



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How to address misconceptions

- Listen first
- Respect beliefs
- Respond respectfully
- Provide clear, simple explanations
- Correct gently



People respond to what they trust
People trust people, not messages

Take-home messages

- Behaviour change drives elimination
- Early care saves lives
- Correct treatment stops transmission
- Trust is everything
- Healthcare workers are critical to drive behaviour change

BUT each of us has a role to play in raising awareness and sharing accurate information about malaria!



Driven to end malaria....

**NOW WE CAN.
NOW WE MUST.**



Thank You

UP End Malaria



www.malaria.up.ac.za