

Malaria cases surge in Zimbabwe during coronavirus fight

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Already battling to contain the novel coronavirus, Zimbabwe health authorities are also facing a surge in malaria cases which has claimed 152 lives this year, a doctor said Friday.

The increase in [malaria](#) cases has raised concerns that some coronavirus cases may go unrecognised since some symptoms of the two diseases are similar.

As the country entered its fourth week of a five-week lockdown imposed to control the spread of the virus, the government announced a 45 percent rise in malaria cases compared to 2019 as the number of deaths increased more than 20 percent.

"This year the cumulative malaria cases in the country stand at 170,303 and the deaths are 152 compared to 117,715 and 127 in 2019 over the same period," the [health ministry](#) announced on twitter.

The figures were released early this week.

"We are beginning to see the cases rising," Norman Matara, secretary general of the

Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights told AFP on Friday.

"Unfortunately this is happening at a time we are battling with another health crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic.

"One of the conditions can be mistaken for the other because some of the symptoms tend to be similar," said Matara.

Zimbabwe was already battling with an ailing health system, suffering from mass shortages of medicines and equipment, and strikes by doctors and nurses.

On Thursday, the World Health Organisation said the new coronavirus pandemic could severely disrupt the anti-malaria fight in sub-Saharan Africa. It warned that malaria deaths risked doubling if efforts are not urgently scaled up.

The UN health agency called on countries in sub-Saharan Africa—where nearly 95 percent of all the world's malaria cases and deaths occur—to ensure malaria prevention and treatment tools are in place, before they are swamped with coronavirus cases.

Sub-Saharan Africa has reported relatively few cases in the COVID-19 pandemic but the agency has long warned that weak health systems in the region risked becoming seriously overwhelmed as cases increase.

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