

Press Release

Injury Mortality Surveillance 2018-2022: Impact of COVID-19 in Mpumalanga

The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and the University of South Africa (Unisa) are pleased to present provisional findings on the impact of COVID-19 on injury deaths in Mpumalanga. Using data captured by the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS) for the period 2018-2022, the trends and patterns of these deaths will be used to inform policy recommendations, public awareness, priorities for community interventions, and further research. Injuries in South Africa are widespread, with mortality higher than global averages. The scarcity of timely and comprehensive injury mortality surveillance information in South Africa was amplified during the recent COVID-19 lockdowns and remains a critical barrier to the development and implementation of policy, support and prevention strategies in the post lockdown period. Thus, there are profound consequences for the families and communities affected, especially within the constraints of the country's overburdened healthcare system. The goal of NIMSS is to provide a permanent surveillance system that will capture all injury deaths occurring in South Africa, with a particular focus on the apparent manner and external cause of death. For 2018-2022, the NIMSS focused its efforts in Mpumalanga with the following goals: (i) to refine its manual collection system, (ii) develop and evaluate a web-based data collection system; and (iii) report on injury mortality trends in the Mpumalanga. All 21 FPS facilities participated for full provincial coverage. The NIMSS data indicates that pre-COVID-19 (2018-2019) transport-related injuries were the leading apparent manner of death in Mpumalanga, followed by homicide, suicide and other unintentional (non-transport) deaths. An analysis of the data during the first hard lockdown of the pandemic reveals a decline across all injury mortalities except for undetermined deaths. The decline was the steepest for transport-related injury mortalities (-75%) and homicides (-57%) during April 2020 in particular, where the lockdown was at its most restrictive level. Thereafter, transport-related deaths, homicide, suicide and other unintentional injury mortalities increased again during less restrictive periods and declined again during the more stringent periods (e.g. alcohol bans and longer curfews), albeit not as much as the first hard lockdown. For the 5-year period overall, homicide continues on an upward trend, while transport-related deaths show a slight downward trend. Undetermined deaths also increased over the past 5 years and this increase may be a reflection of the challenges faced by Forensic Pathology Services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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