

Cape Verde is the third African country to eliminate malaria: here's how

Cape Verde has been certified [malaria-free](#) by the World Health Organization.

By Tiaan de Jager and Taneshka Kruger^{5 Feb 2024}



Source: [Pexels](#)

The archipelago to the west of Senegal consists of 10 islands, and has a population of over [500,000 people](#). It is the [third](#) country in Africa to be declared malaria-free, after Mauritius (in 1973) and Algeria (in 2019).

This brings the total of [malaria-free countries](#) to 43 worldwide.

Achieving malaria-free certification is no simple feat. As specialists in malaria prevention and control, we explain Cape Verde's long journey to eliminating the disease that killed over 600,000 people worldwide in [2022](#).

How Cape Verde achieved its goal

Malaria, endemic since settlement of the previously uninhabited islands in the [15th century](#), affected all 10 islands before 1950.

During the [1940s](#), malaria posed a serious health threat. Severe epidemics resulted in over 10,000 cases and 200 deaths annually until targeted interventions were implemented.

The country was close to eliminating malaria [twice](#) but these gains were not sustained.

Indoor residual spraying with [DDT](#) was done on each island until transmission ended nationwide in 1967. The residual effect of the insecticide helped kill mosquitoes over a longer period. Larviciding, the use of chemicals to target mosquito larvae at breeding sites, and active case detection were also undertaken.



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The indoor residual spraying campaigns were stopped in 1969. The result was a [recurrence](#) of local transmission on

Santiago island in 1973, followed by a large epidemic in 1977.

The second attempt to eliminate malaria started in 1978, and resulted in transmission interruption in 1983. Case numbers were maintained at [low levels from 1989](#), confining malaria to Santiago and Boa Vista islands. But by [2006](#), rising cases threatened tourism.

A political decision was made to boost nationwide elimination efforts. This led to a change in the country's national health policy [in 2007](#).

The focus was on expanded diagnosis, early and effective treatment, and management of all cases.

Cape Verde was on track to eliminate malaria, but in 2017 recorded its "[worst malaria outbreak](#)" since 1991 with [423 cases](#)

The outbreak prompted a strategy adjustment. A [refocusing](#) on vector control, targeting affected neighbourhoods and malaria infection-prone communities, prevented increases in cases. Transmission was successfully interrupted for four years.

Process to get certified malaria free

The WHO reported 249 million malaria cases and 619,000 malaria-related deaths globally [in 2022](#).

The African region accounted for 94% of all cases and 96% of all deaths.

Achieving malaria-free status highlights a nation's determination and commitment. Countries must meet the WHO's stringent criteria to reach this goal. Firstly, there must be [zero indigenous](#) (locally) transmitted cases of malaria for at least three consecutive years.

Secondly a country must show that it has the ability to prevent reintroduction of disease transmission.



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Only then may countries [request certification](#) from the WHO, working with regional offices to develop a certification plan and a timeline.

If a country fails, it can reapply after three years.

To maintain malaria-free status, countries must continue to prevent transmission and submit annual reports to the WHO.

Predictions for the next countries to take the leap

The WHO's [E-2025 initiative](#) focuses on 25 countries targeting elimination by 2025.

Belize achieved elimination in 2023. Malaysia reported zero local transmission for the fifth consecutive year, while Timor-Leste and Saudi Arabia achieved two consecutive years without local transmission (2021 and 2022). If maintained, they may be declared malaria-free soon. For the first time, both Bhutan and Suriname reported zero indigenous cases in 2022.

In the Africa region, several countries reported [significant reductions](#) in indigenous transmission in 2022. These included Botswana (43.5%), Eswatini (57.6%) and South Africa (31.3%). The Comoros saw a doubling in cases in the same year. São Tomé and Príncipe noted a 46% increase.

Despite [country efforts](#), extreme climate events and cross-border movement may have an impact on transmission or recurrence.

Attaining certification holds importance, and Cape Verde's success will drive positive development in the country.

[Tourism](#) plays an important role in the country's economy. It accounted for a substantial share of the country's GDP pre-Covid (24%), formal employment (10%), and the majority of foreign investment. Malaria-free status can potentially draw m visitors to the country.

The infrastructure established for malaria elimination has bolstered the country's health system. This can be beneficial against other mosquito-borne diseases such as [dengue fever](#), which also affects tourism.

A country's "personal" milestone can help drive global malaria elimination efforts. Cape Verde's achievement is a call to action for the malaria community to not give up. We must push harder to end malaria for good.

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