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Monitoring health trends in real time based on death registers in Antananarivo

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In most African countries, trends in mortality by cause are estimated from epidemiological models because the coverage of the civil registration system remains low and the available statistics on the causes of death from health care facilities are not representative at the national level. In this context, the death notification system set up in Antananarivo is relatively unique as it allows the evolution of mortality and the burden of the main diseases to be accurately monitored. In this paper, we will first assess the performance of this reporting system through six dimensions: the completeness of the registration of deaths, the quality of the reporting of causes of death, the quality of the reporting of age and sex, the internal consistency of the data, the level of detail of the causes of death, as well as their timeliness. Two illustrations will then be provided to demonstrate the value of such death reporting systems: the analysis of the seasonality of deaths by cause, and the near real-time monitoring of the disruptions introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The relatively unique case of Antananarivo will be discussed in relation to the situation in other urban centres in Madagascar and in other African countries where the gaps in data on causes of death remain huge.