

HIV prevention and treatment in the era of COVID-19 in South Africa

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Background

- The COVID-19 epidemic overwhelmed health services and critically disrupted the routine provision of essential health services globally.
- When the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a public health emergency, the South African government in response to an increase in cases and to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 implemented several measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Methods

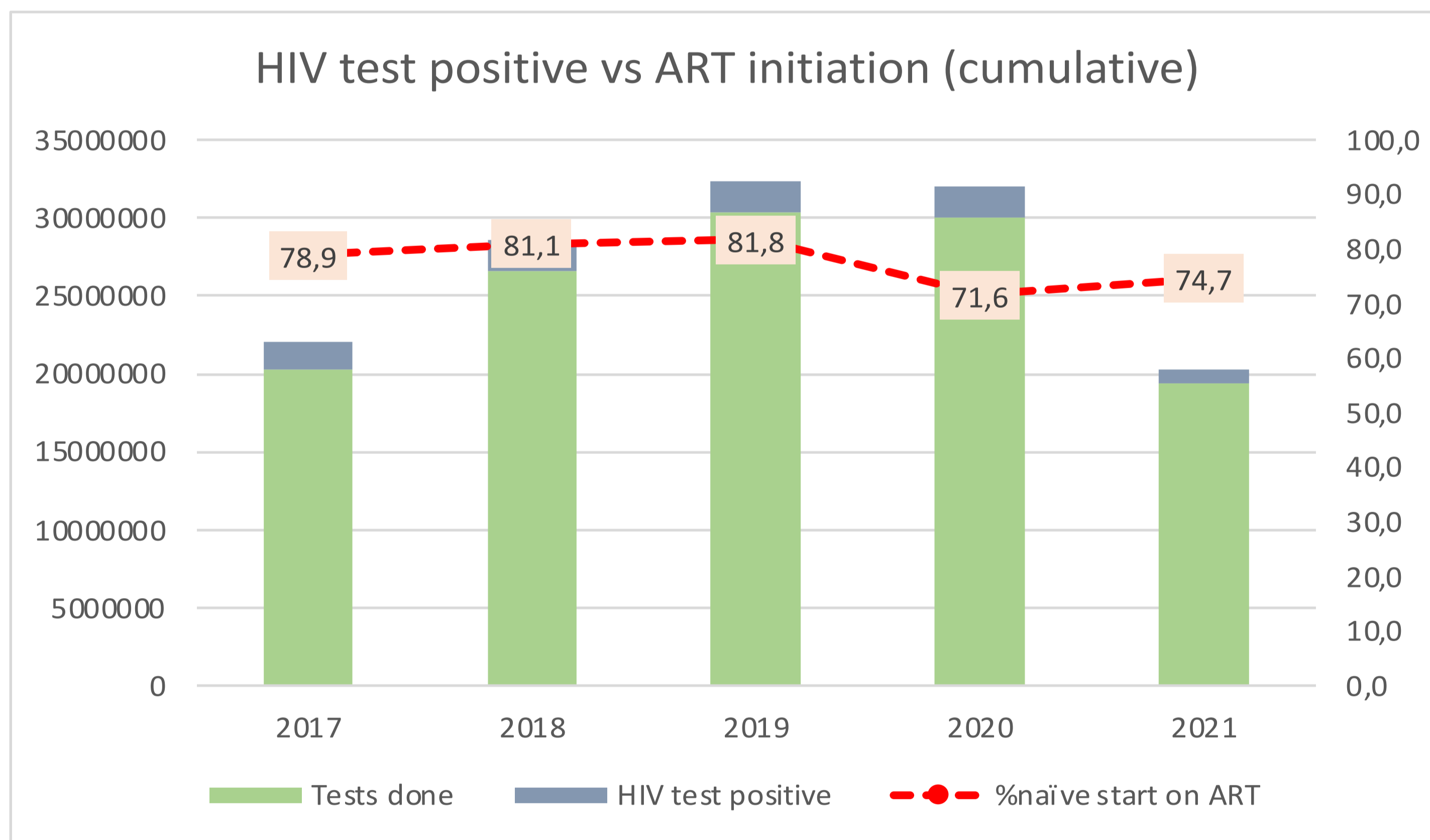
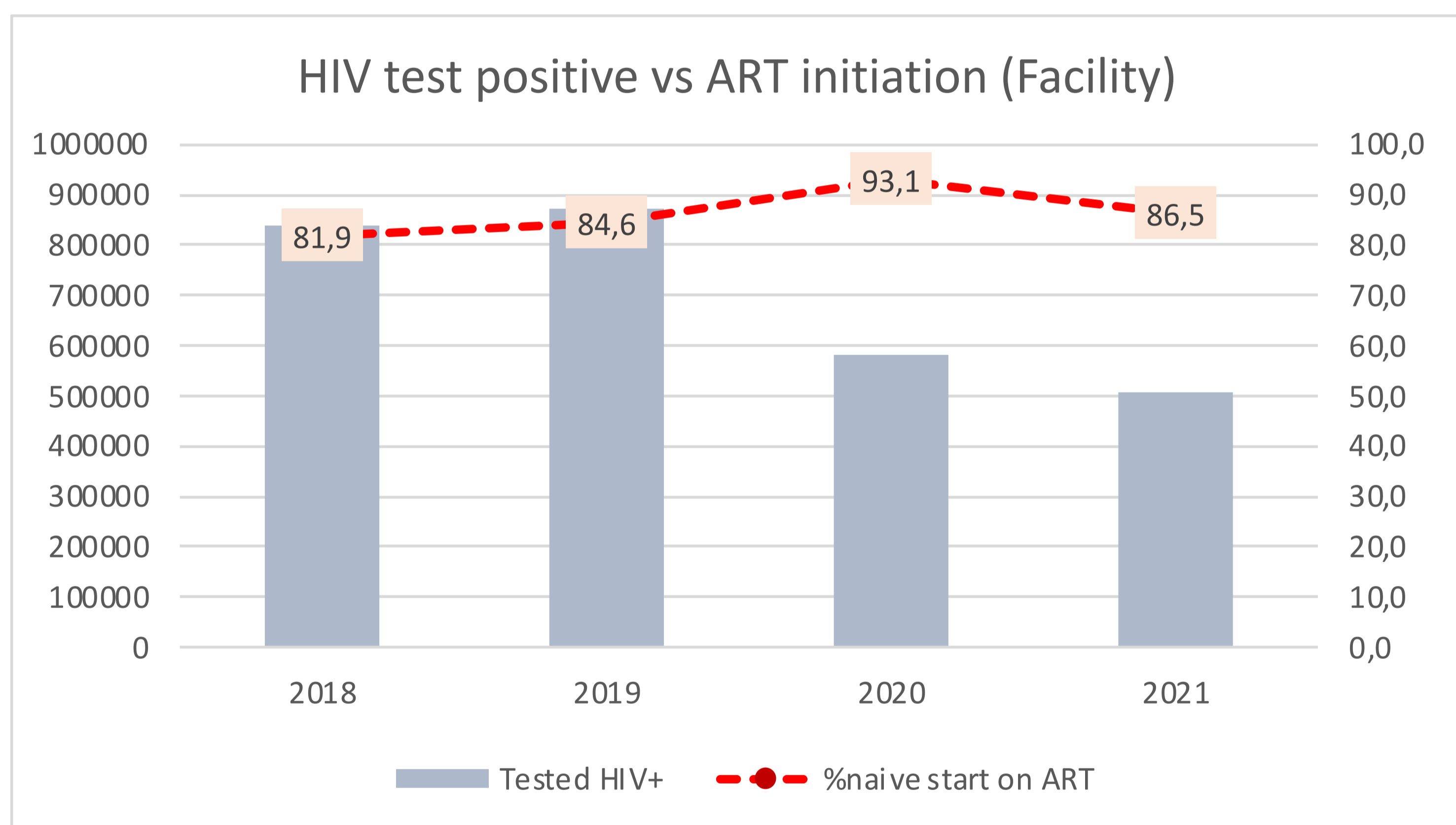
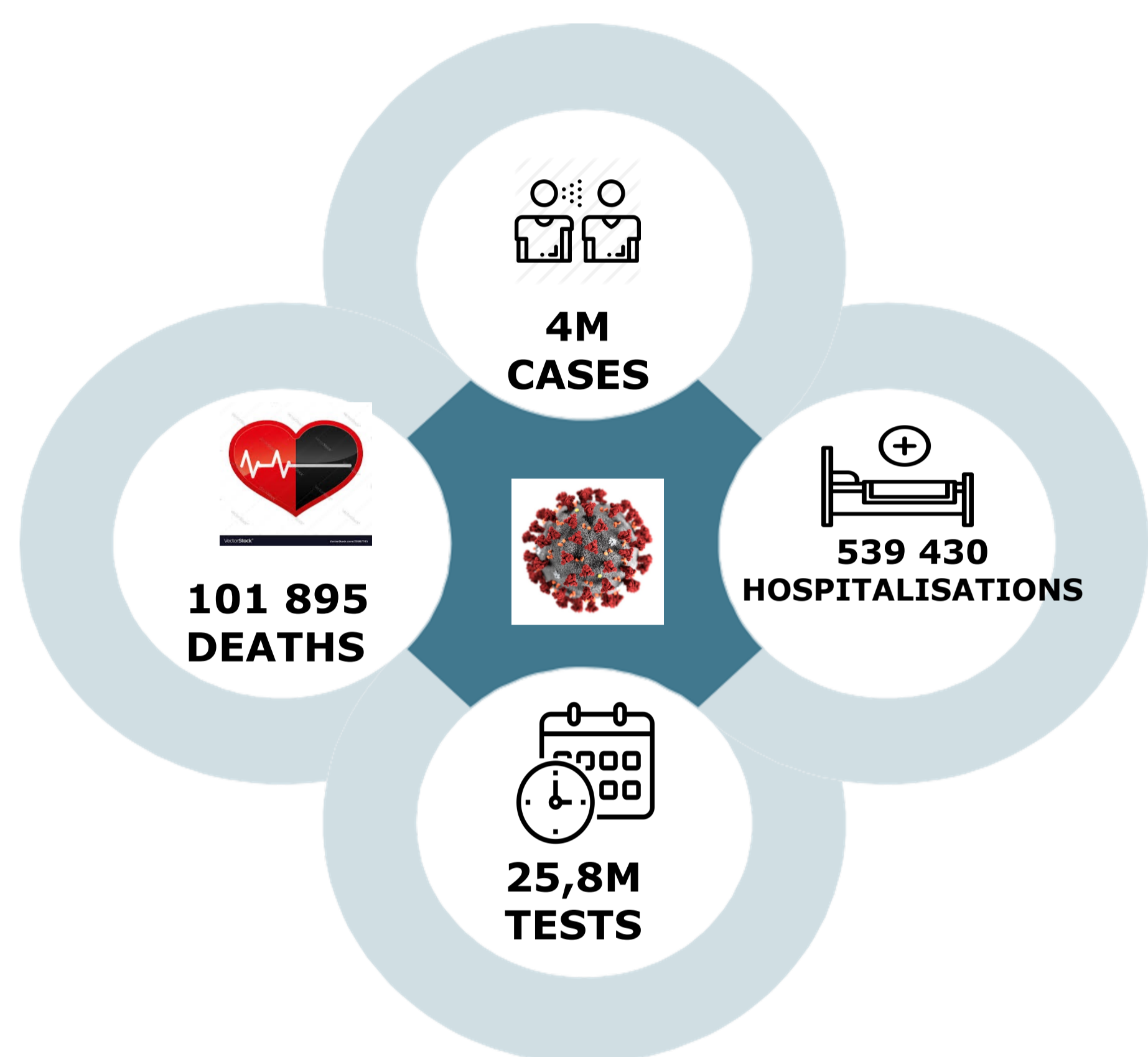
- A retrospective mortality line-list review was conducted on COVID-19 deaths from 27th March to 28th February 2021 from all nine provinces in South Africa.
- Descriptive statistics were used to summarise mortality data reports from provinces.
- In addition, retrospective HIV testing and ART initiation data were extracted from the District Health Information System (DHIS) for the 2019-2021 period

Results

- A review of DHIS data indicated a 1,1% decline of HIV tests done in 2020 compared with 2019.
- In 2021, there was a further decline in HIV testing of 35.4% compared to 2020.
- In 2019, 81.8% of those who tested positive were initiated on ART; however, the figure declined to 71,6% in 2020, rising marginally to 74,7% in 2021.
- COVID-19 mortality data shows that of the total 50 148 deaths reported during the review period, 4% were HIV positive patients and 58% were female.
- TB-HIV co-infection was reported in 13% of the HIV deaths, diabetes was reported in 24.2% of the HIV positive deaths, whilst a combination of HIV, diabetes and hypertension was reported in 13% of the deaths.

Conclusions

- Lockdown measures impacted an already fragmented health system, including HIV testing and treatment services.
- Management of COVID-19 for patients with HIV is further complicated by co-morbidities such as hypertension and diabetes.
- Preparing for pandemics and having a resilient health system (especially the primary health care system) is vital to ensure continuity of care.
- In addition, the importance of designing health systems to treat patients with multi-morbidities should be prioritised.



- The lockdown measures reduced the use of health services and affected continuity of care for people with TB, HIV and other chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension.
- This study seeks to assess the effect of COVID-19 on HIV prevention and treatment programs as well as on mortality.

