

# Continuity of Essential Health and Nutrition Services during the COVID-19 pandemic

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# Introduction

- ▶ WHO declared the novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV2) outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 31, 2020 and subsequently, a pandemic in March 11, 2020.
- ▶ The first cases of COVID-19 in Ghana were reported on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020
- ▶ The pandemic has been challenging to health systems across the world.
- ▶ Rapidly increasing demand for care of people with COVID-19, compounded by fear, misinformation and limitations on the movement of people and supplies has led to disruption of essential health services in most countries including Ghana.

# Initial COVID-19 prevention interventions with service delivery implications

- On Mar 16, all schools were closed
- A ban on all social gatherings was put in place.
- Starting on March 22 2020, all air, land and sea borders were closed
- Beginning on March 27 2020, a three-week partial lockdown was imposed in parts of Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions.

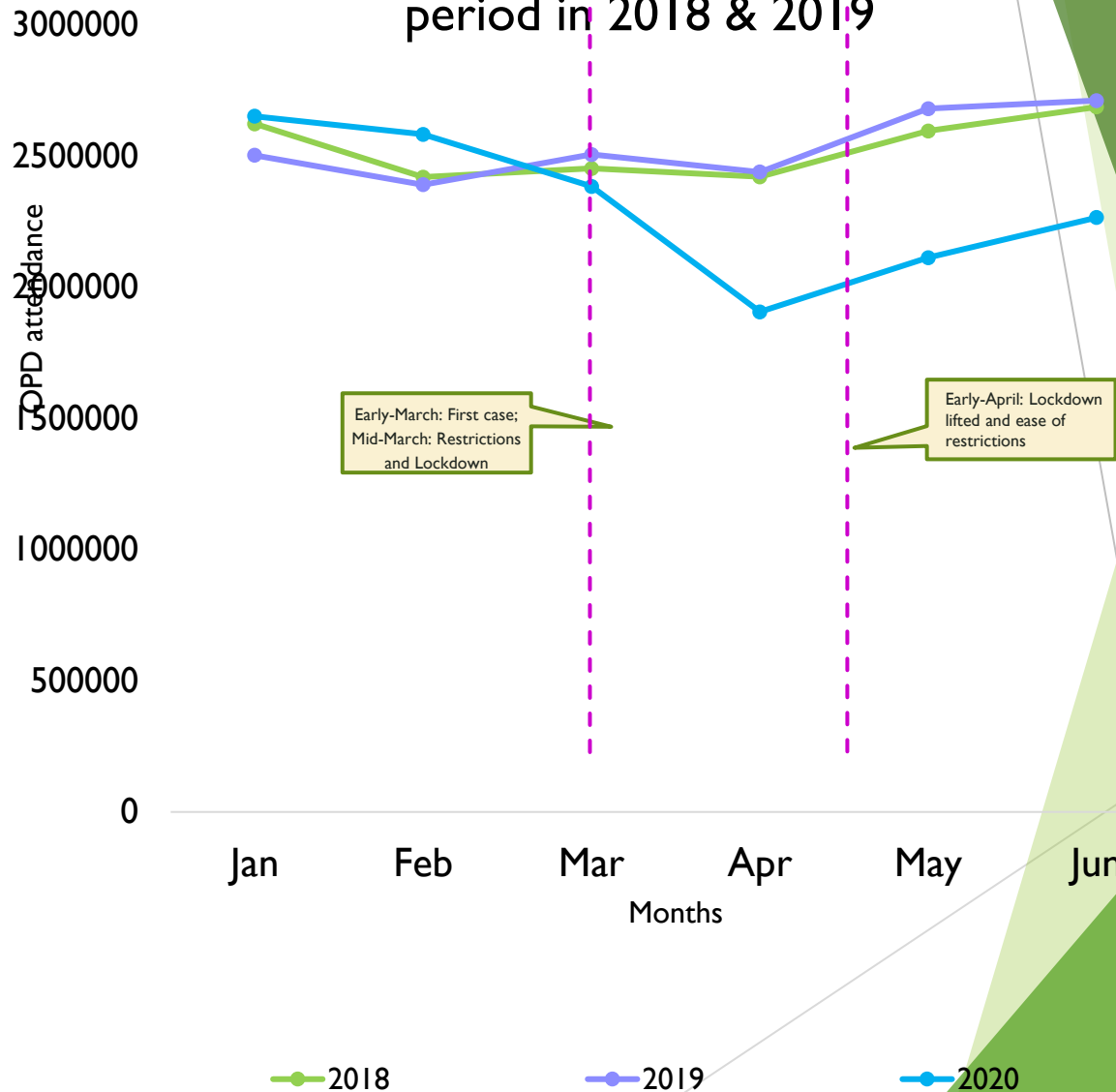
# Disruption in essential health services-

## The evidence

- ▶ Following the lock down from March going into April 2020, there were anecdotal evidence based on public complaints that access to essential services have been compromised due to the pandemic.
- ▶ A review of the routine health information data of Ghana extracted from the District Health Information Management System for March and April 2020 using selected indicators from the Health Sector Medium Plan, showed that essential services utilisation and coverage had reduced.

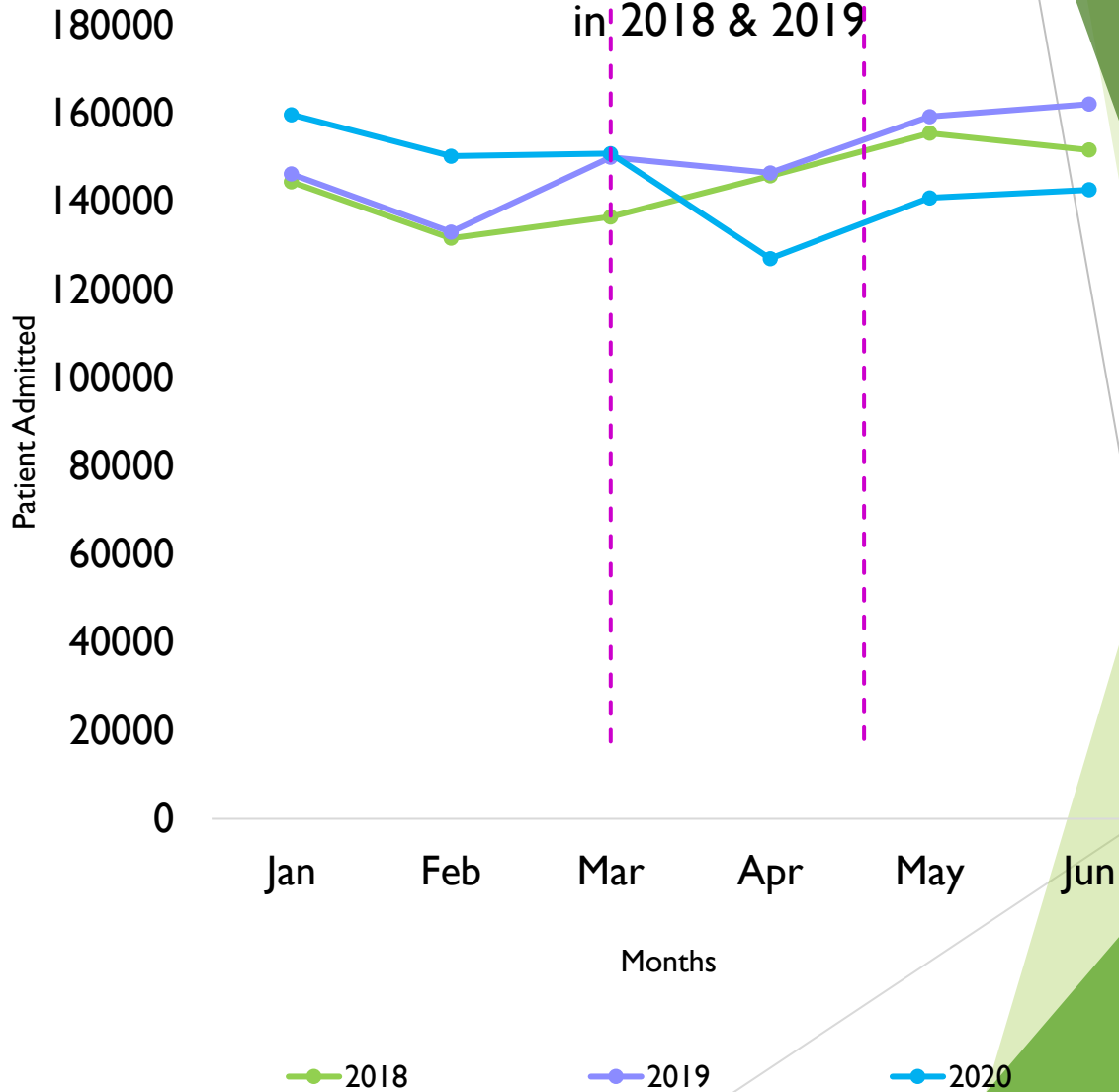
# OPD Attendance

Decline in trends of OPD attendance at the health facilities in Ghana from March-June 2020 compared to same period in 2018 & 2019



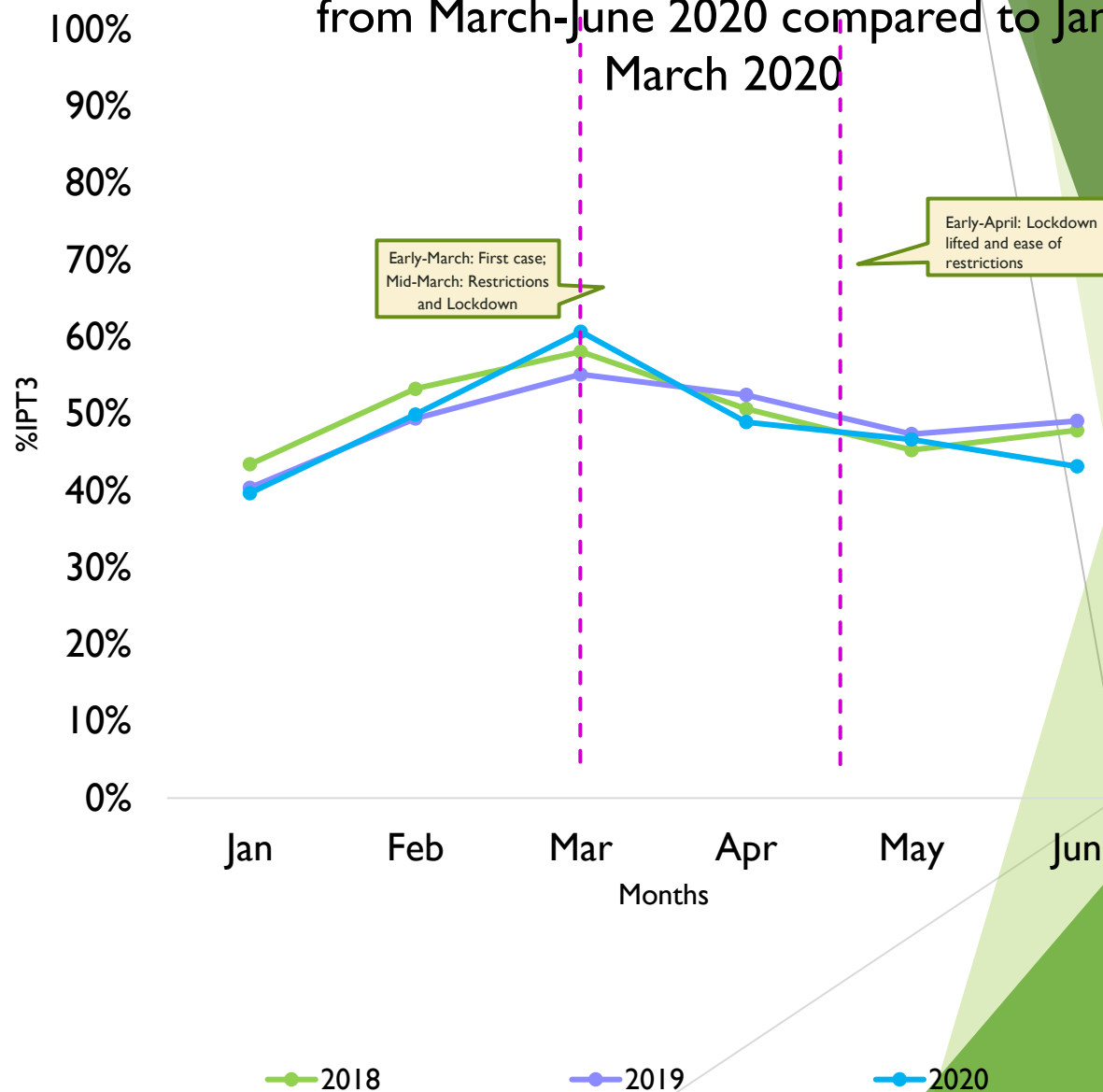
# Total Admissions

Decline in trends of Patient admissions at the health facilities in Ghana from March-June 2020 compared to same period in 2018 & 2019



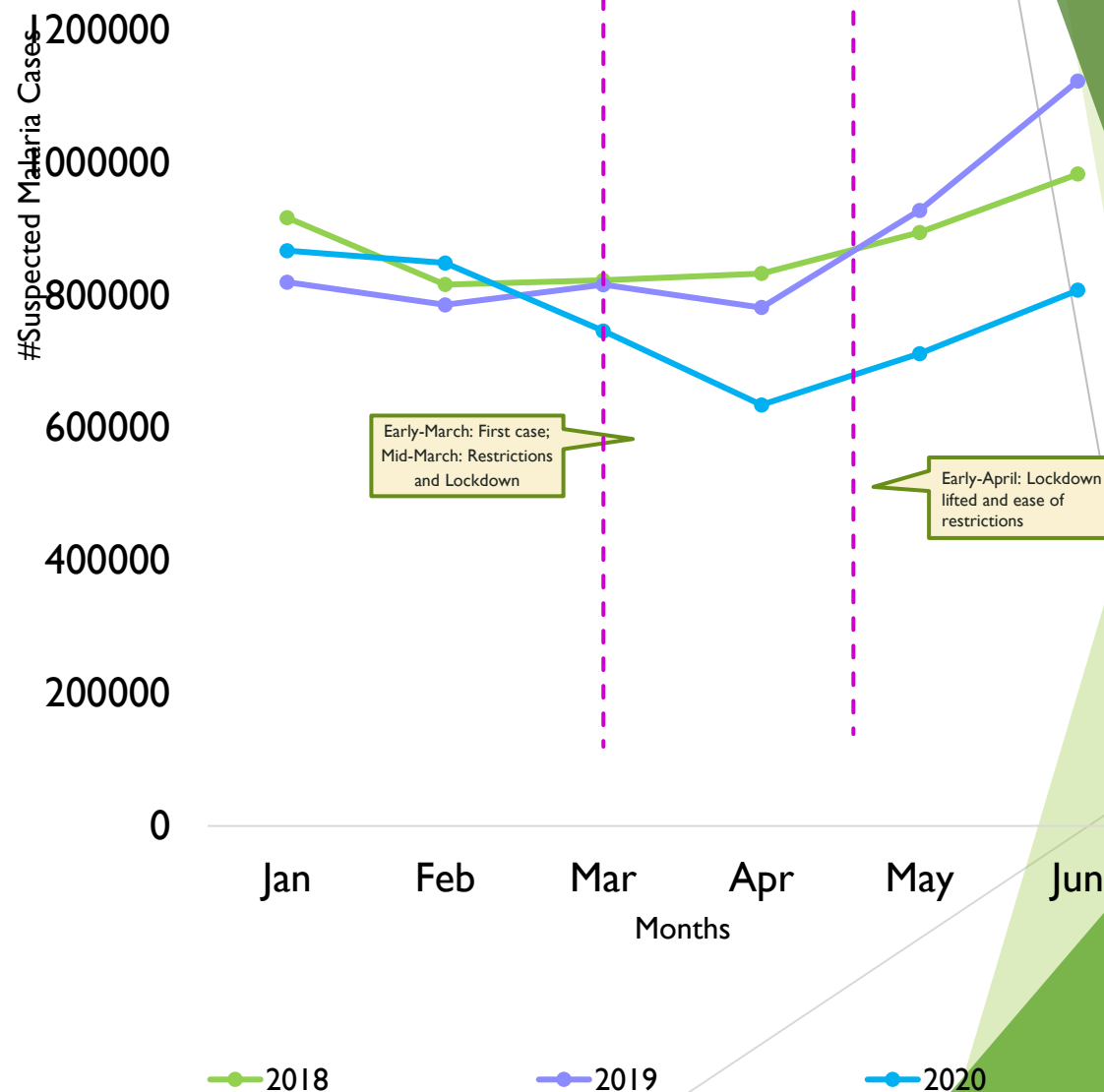
# IPTp 3 Coverage

Decline in trends of IPTp 3 Coverage at the health facilities in Ghana from March-June 2020 compared to Jan-March 2020



# Suspected Malaria Cases

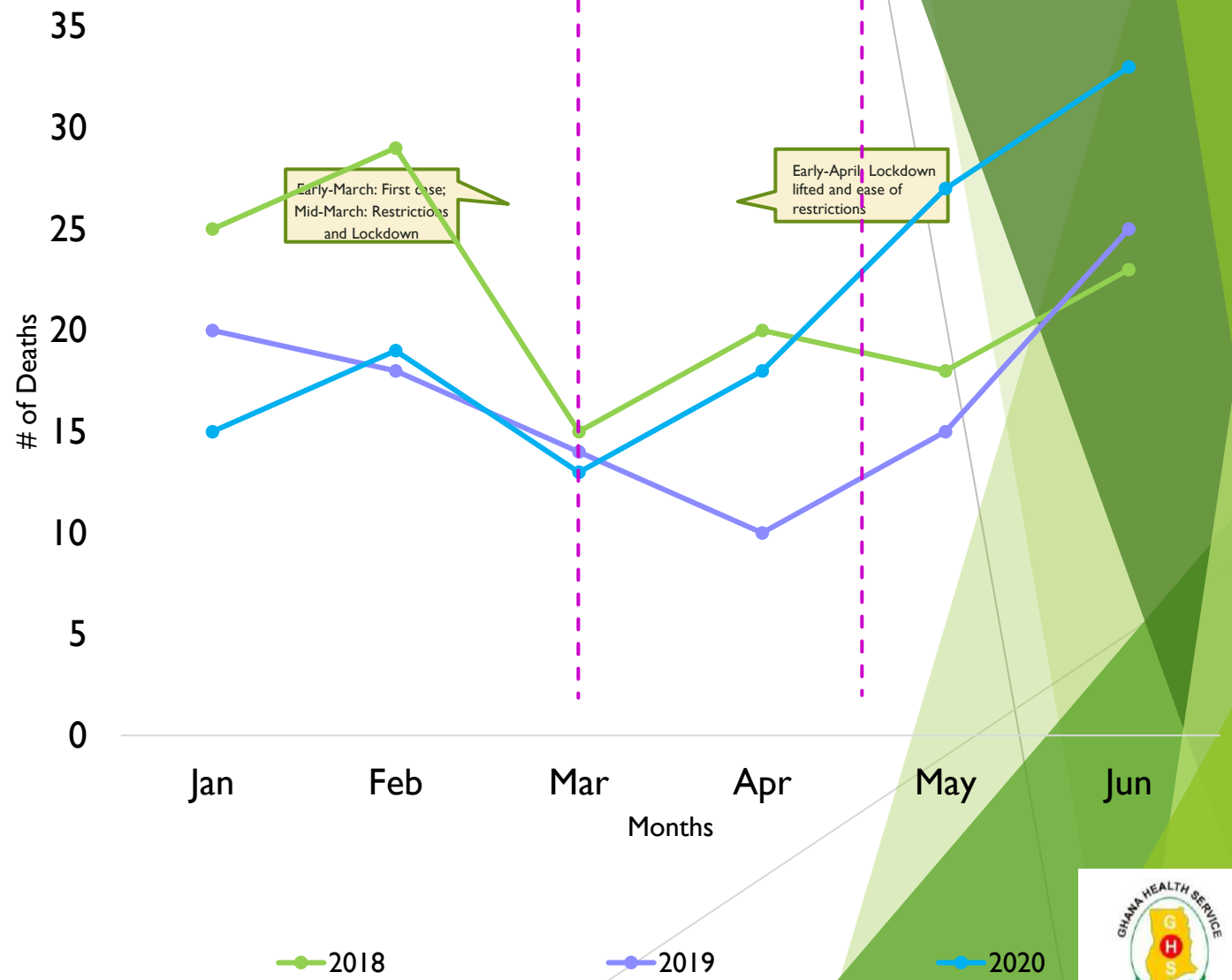
Decline in trends of Suspected Malaria Cases at the health facilities in Ghana from March-June 2020 compared to same period in 2018 & 2019





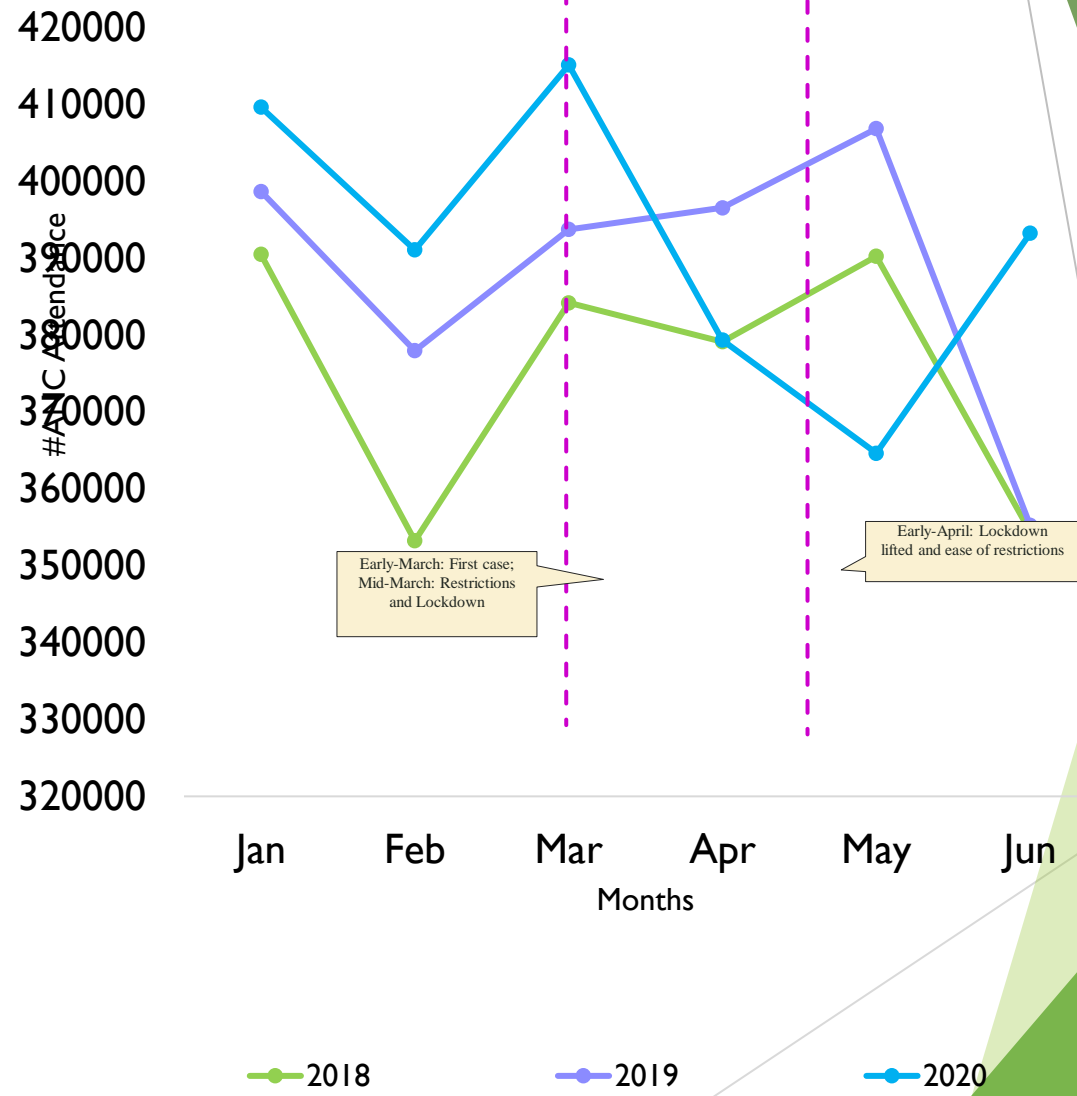
# Malaria Deaths in Ghana (<5 and 5+ years)

Increase in trends of Malaria Deaths (<5 & ≥5 years) at the health facilities in Ghana from March-June 2020 compared to same period in 2018 & 2019



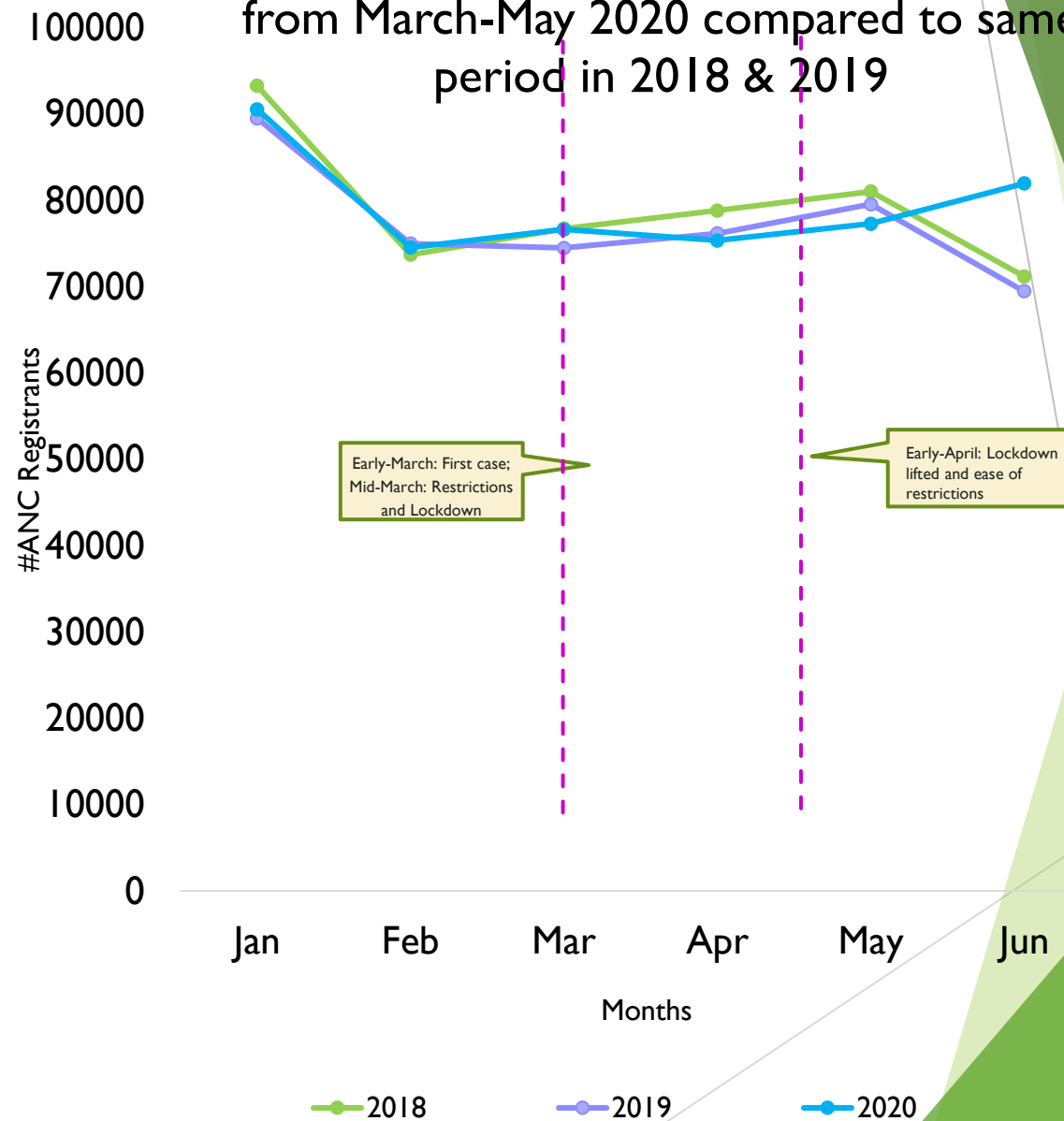
# ANC Attendance

Decline in trends of ANC Attendance at the health facilities in Ghana from March-May 2020 compared to same period in 2018 & 2019



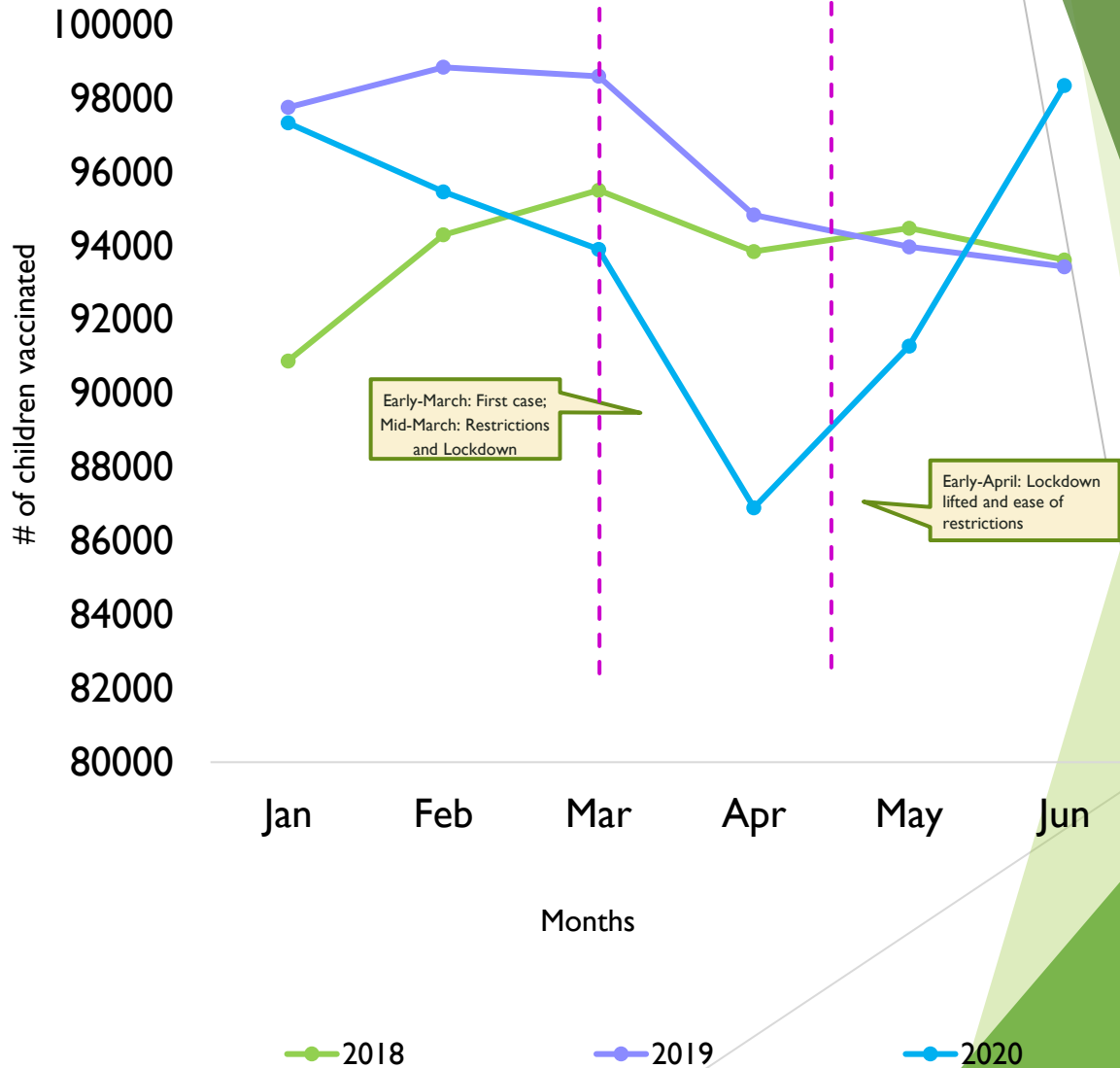
# ANC Registrants

Slight decline in trends of ANC registrants at the health facilities in Ghana from March-May 2020 compared to same period in 2018 & 2019

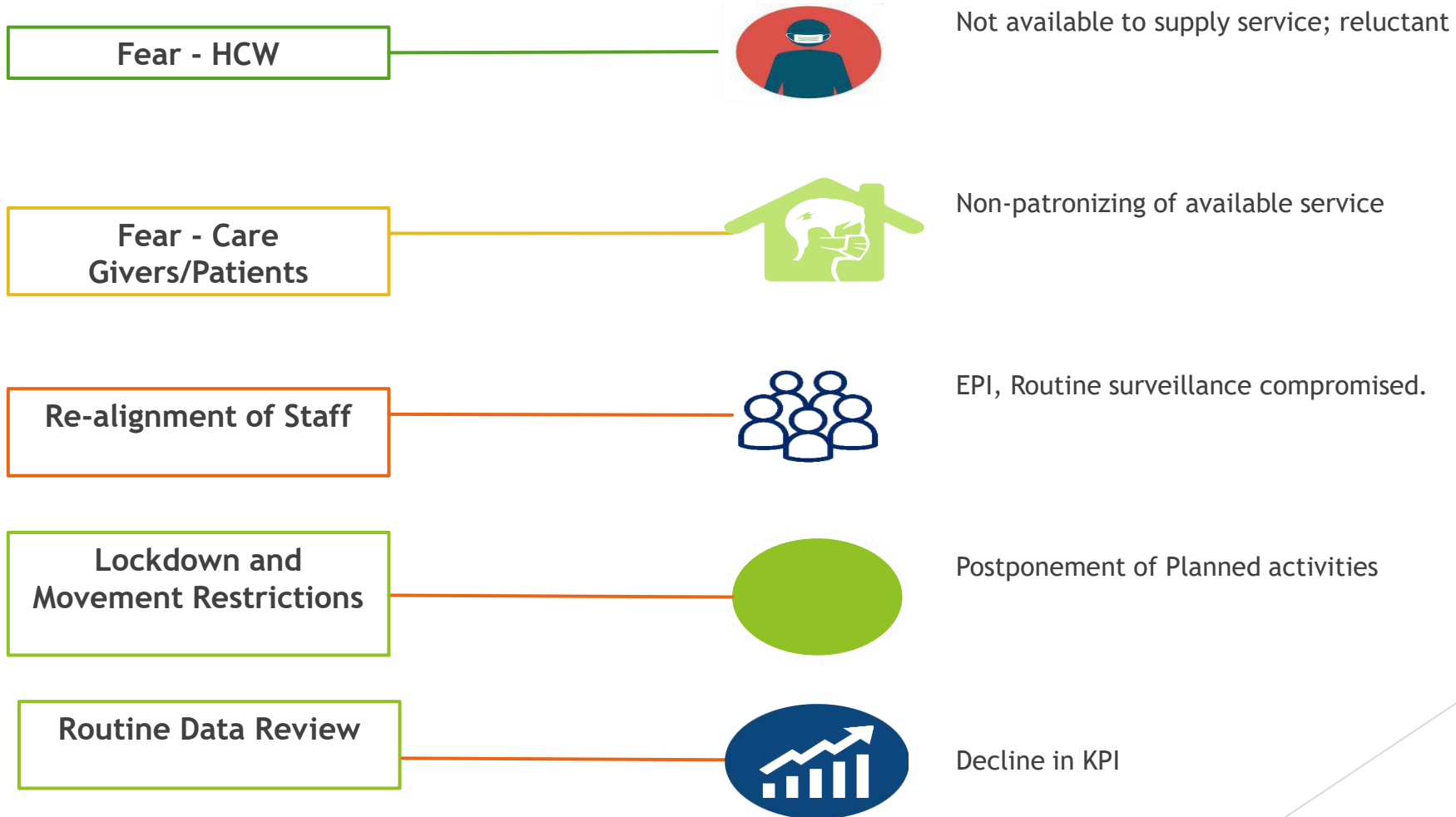


# Penta 3

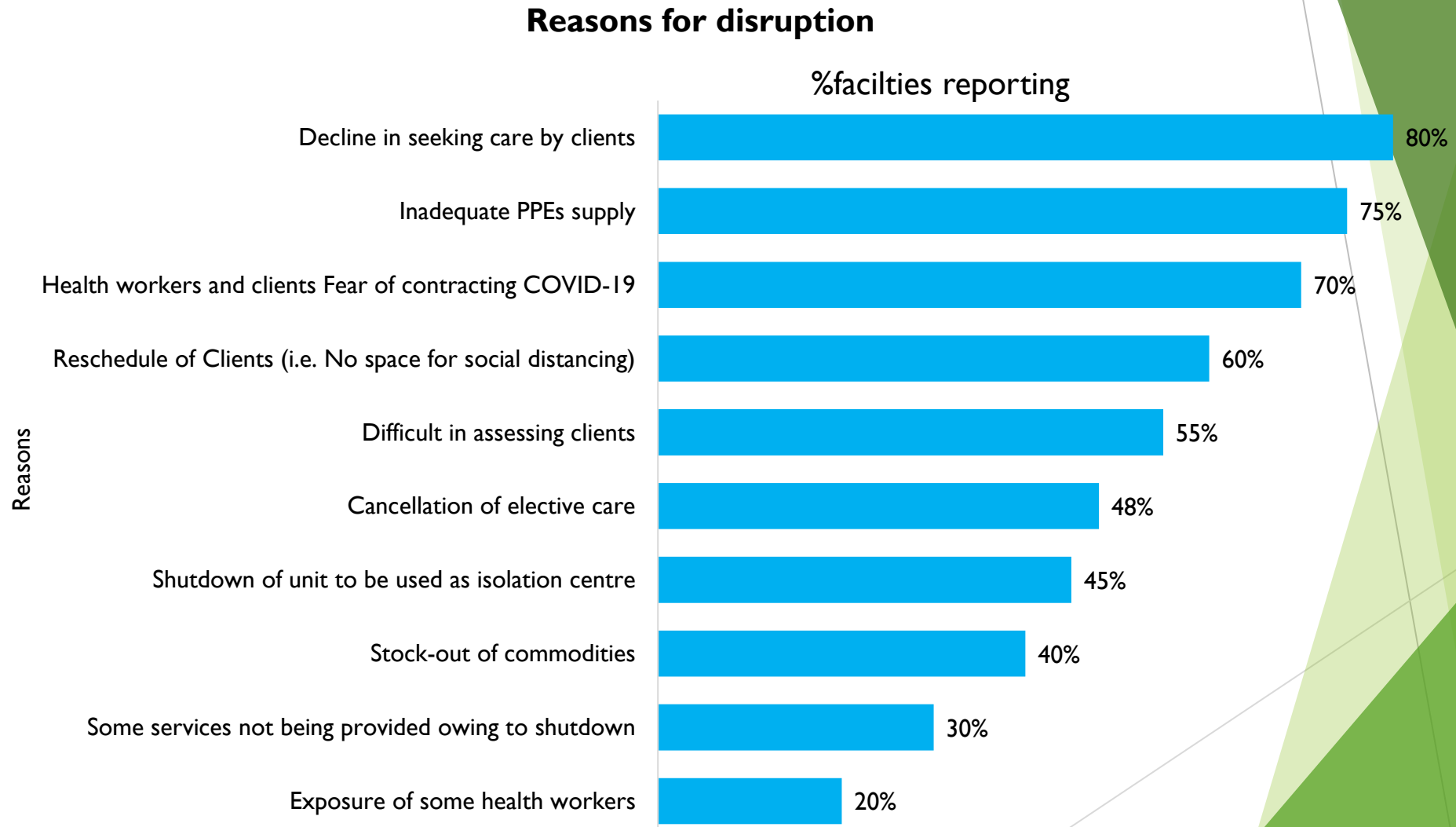
Decline in trends of children vaccinated in Penta 3 at the health facilities in Ghana from March-May 2020 compared to same period in 2018 & 2019



# Reasons for the disruption- Anecdotal

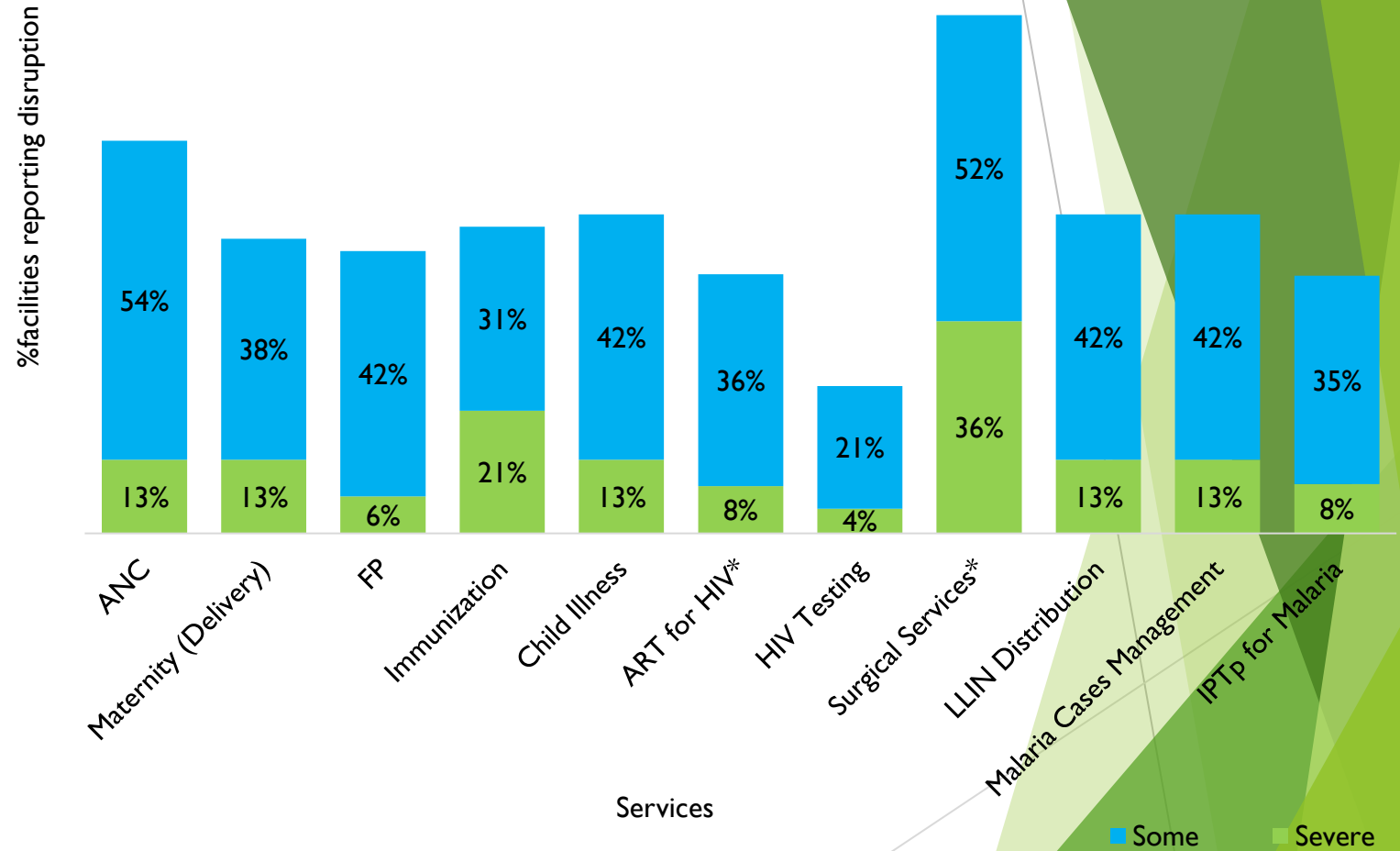


# Reasons for disruptions from rapid assessment (IMPACT Malaria/GHS)

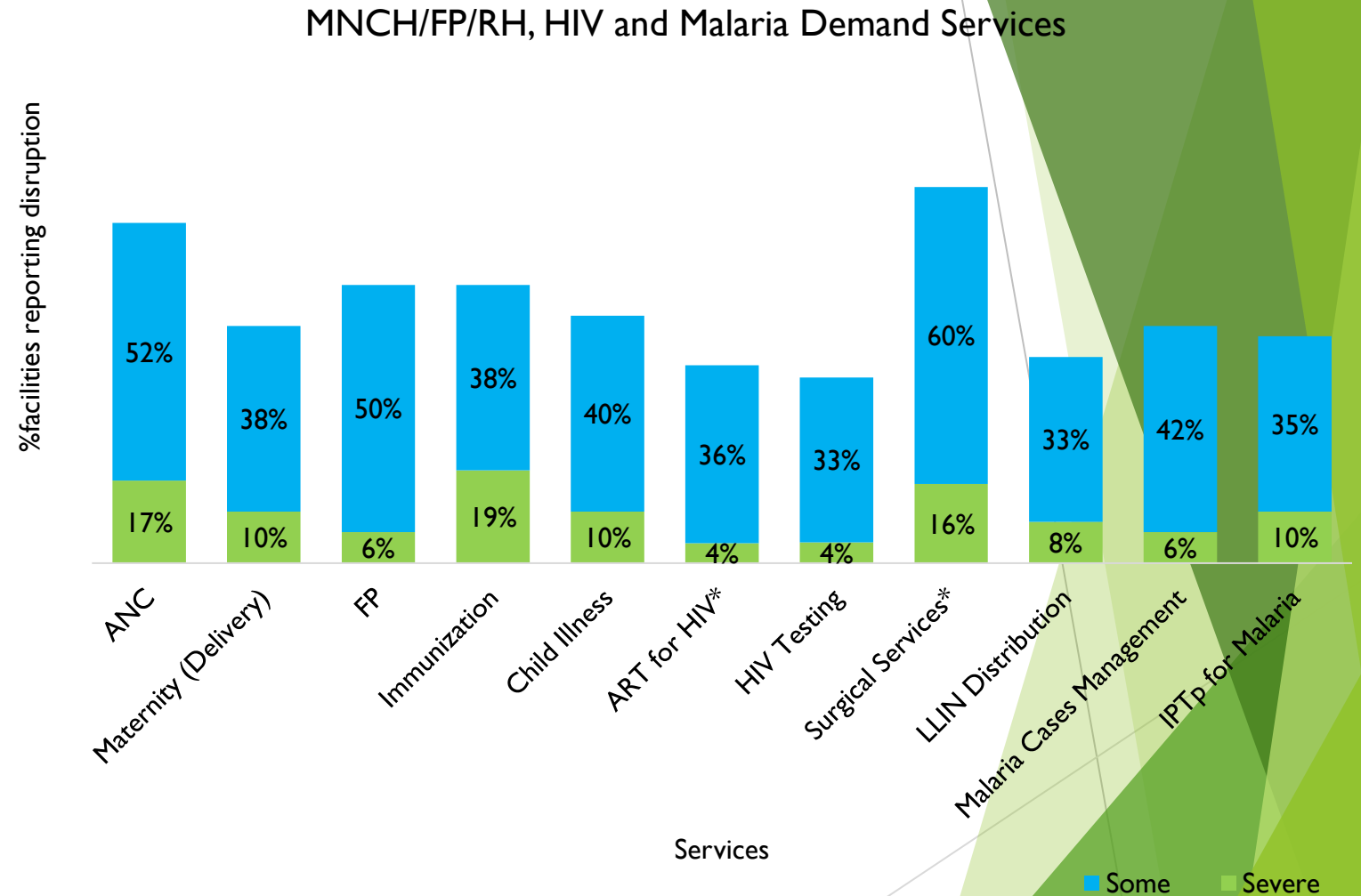


# Service Disruption (N=48)

## MNCH/FP/RH, HIV and Malaria Service Disruption

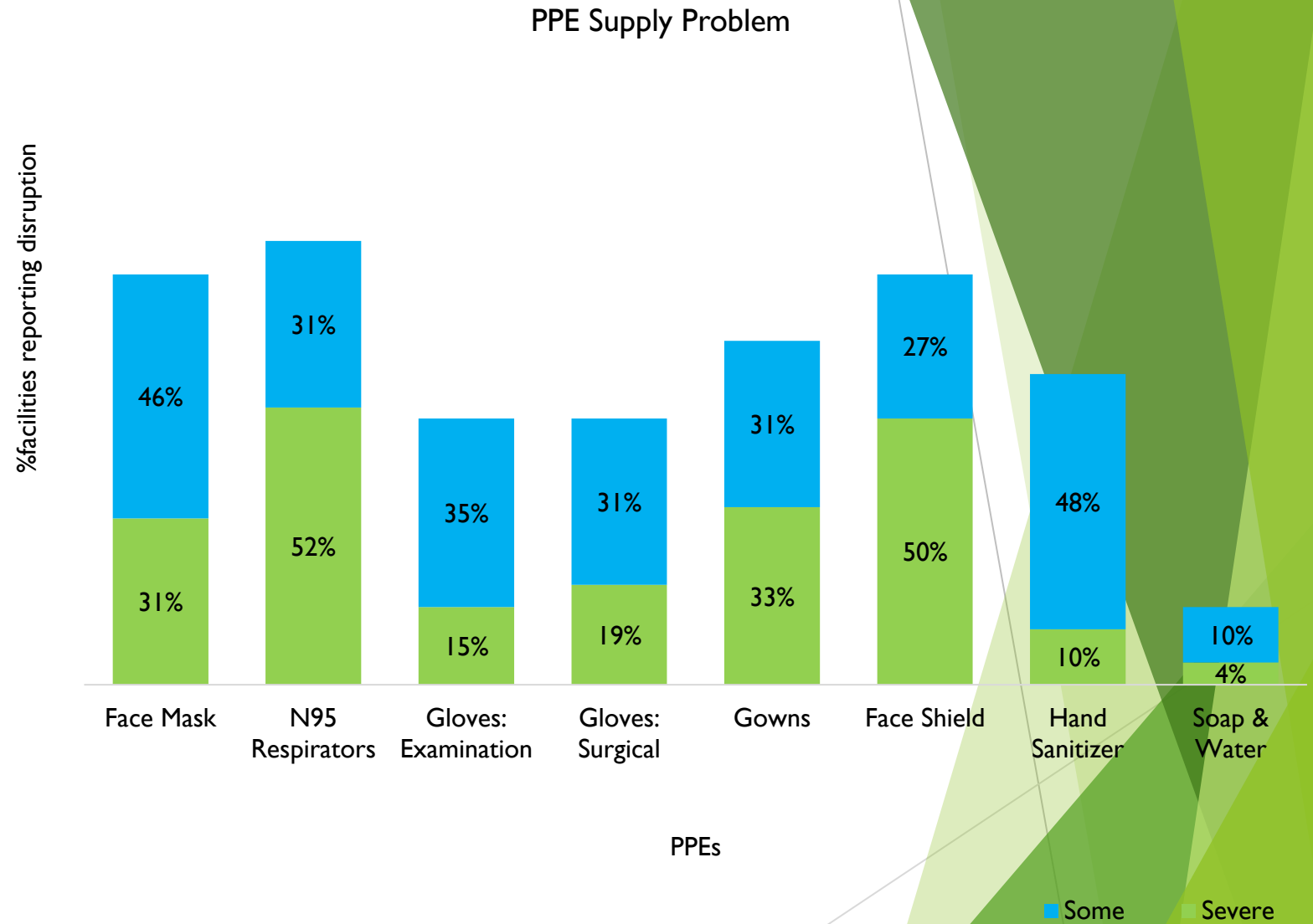


# Demand Disruption (N=48)





# PPE Supply (N=48)



# Response of the Health Sector

- ▶ The Director-General of Ghana Health Service, assigned the Deputy Director-General the task of overseeing the continuity of essential health services.
- ▶ The Family Health Division of the Ghana Health Service, the division responsible for reproductive and child health came out with the initial guidance document on ensuring continuity of essential health service.
- ▶ Malaria, HIV/AIDS and TB control programmes came up with similar guidance to facilitate access to essential health service for malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS. UNICEF and WHO supported these initial processes of providing guidance in ensuring continuity of essential services.
- ▶ JPHIEGO supported some districts in Greater Accra and Ashanti Region the two regions with the highest number of cases to facilitate access to essential health care services.

# Response of the Health Sector

- ▶ The Ministry of Health issued a call to action to ensure essential health service continuity. This was shared with all stakeholders in the health sector including civil society organisations in health as well as the development partners in Ghana.
- ▶ This call to action defined what needed to be done on both the supply and demand side of service delivery as well as the resources needed to ensure that essential health services did not fall through the cracks in the midst of tackling COVID 19

# Response of the Health Sector

The Health development partners in response to the call to action issued a statement pledging their support to ensuring continuity of essential service.

Among some of the recommendations they made to the government were:

- *Prepare a comprehensive guide on service continuity in general as well as program specific continuity guides, which highlight how routine service should be delivered.*
- *Integrate existing activities being carried out to ensure gains in efficiency, including outreach activities (immunization, surveillance, etc.). Use existing systems for intensive COVID-19 response, like outreach activities, to deliver other services or vice versa*
- *Prepare a guide for re-initiation of community-based outreach services*
- *Adapt service delivery models to reduce the number of health facility visits (i.e., multi-month dispensing for those needing long term treatment and use of telemedicine and digital technologies/innovations)*

# Response of the Health Sector

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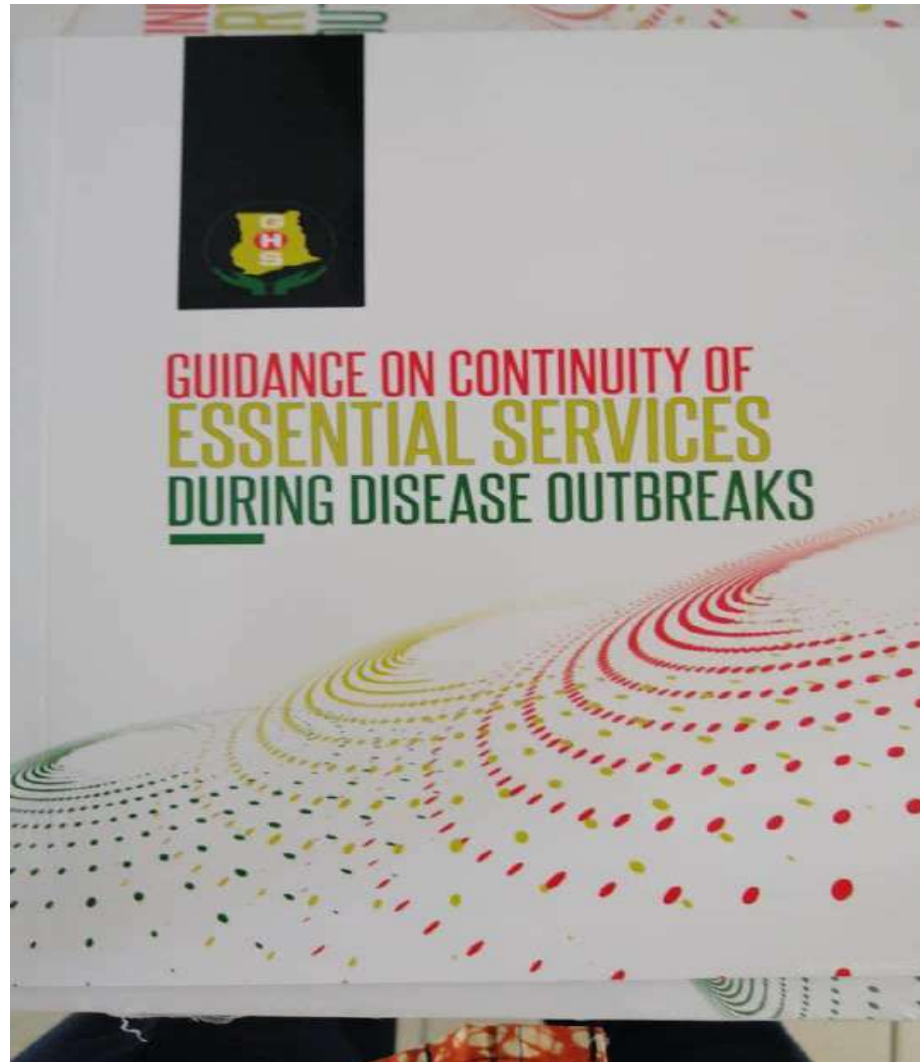
Among some of the recommendations they made to the government were:

- *Devise fast track services for clients with comorbidities to reduce risk of COVID-19 infection*
- *Provide necessary inputs and intensify adherence of infection IPC measures at all health facilities at all levels*
- *Intensify social and behaviour change communication to the public to ensure continued demand and utilization of services and sustain public trust in health services*
- *Explore options for harnessing the capacity of private providers to maintain essential services*

# Response of the Health Sector

- ▶ Global Financing Facility (GFF) provided a virtual training on how to use the existing health data to track and make interventions to improve access to essential health service for a team selected from service agencies by the Ministry of Health.
- ▶ Technical Assistants of expert public health physicians were provided for each of the 16 region through support by
- ▶ The WHO supported the development of a comprehensive guidance document for essential service delivery.
- ▶ This document was initially disseminated electronically to the Regions. Hard copies have now been printed and distributed to all the regions for distribution to health facilities

# Guidance Document



# The general guidance captured in the document are:

- Facility managers were tasked to ensure effective patient flow (screening, triage, and targeted referral) were established in each facility. All clients visiting a facility are screened and go through mandatory triage. If found to fit the case definition of COVID 19, the clients were held in a holding area and appropriately referred for testing and management.
- Each facility was asked to comply with the established guidelines and protocols for attending to needs of clients who test positive for COVID 19 or are in quarantine as a result of being in contacts of positive cases to reduce the spread of the disease.
- Allowing patients especially those with NCD to book for appointment to reduce the crowding at OPD.



# The general guidance captured in the document are:

- Use of technology- Telemedicine -to reduce service providers/Client physical interaction.
- Virtual management meetings to track service performance and make the needed changes
- Sharing of Information with clients and the public on current arrangements in facilities, through mass media announcements and discussions, social media, posters, handbills etc. to promote continuous utilization of essential services.
- Provide Psychosocial support for staff, patients and relatives requiring such services.

# Response of the Health Sector

- ▶ Feedback on faltering service coverage were sent to Regions in May 2021 and Regions were tasked to draw plans to facilitate access to essential health services
- ▶ Virtual Senior Managers meetings were held with all Regional Health Management Teams to discuss COVID 19 management and ensuring essential health services.
- ▶ Regional Directors also held virtual meetings with their District Health Management Teams on COVID 19 response as well health service provision.
- ▶ A virtual half year performance review meeting was held by Ghana Health Service in July 2021, to assess the half year performance and come up with plans to ensure that targets are achieved

# Key activities undertaken to address demand side challenges

1. Behaviour change communication was launched using multiple channels including social media to encourage use of facilities by the public.
2. Providing avenue for patients with non-communicable diseases to book appointment to visit health facilities.
3. Using technology like telemedicine to provide care for some patients who re reluctant to come to health facilities

# Key activities undertaken to address Supply side challenges

To help build staff confidence to offer care the following were done

1. Adequate Preventive Protective Equipment (PPE) were provided for all staff in all facilities. The Ghana Logistic Management Information System was used to provide visibility to the PPEs and ensure that shortages were promptly addressed. The government supported some local industries to manufacture face masks, coveralls, face shields and alcohol hand rubs
2. Health workers underwent training on COVID 19 and Infection Prevention and Control.
3. Supportive supervisions were done as a follow up to the training.

# Key activities undertaken to address Supply side challenges

To help build staff confidence to offer care to the public the following were done

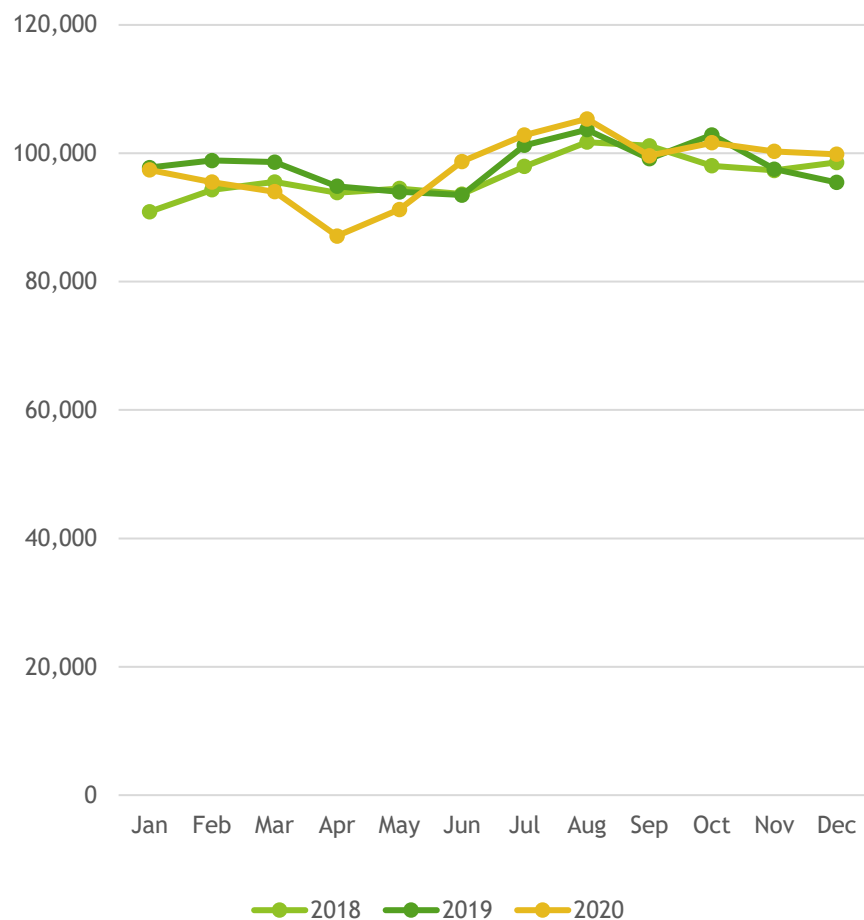
4. Provision of appropriate PPE for service delivery points.
5. Adequate functional hand washing/sanitizing facilities were made available for all clients and service providers at all entry and service delivery points.
6. Non-contact thermometer guns were procured and used in taking temperature of patients in all facilities.

# Achievements

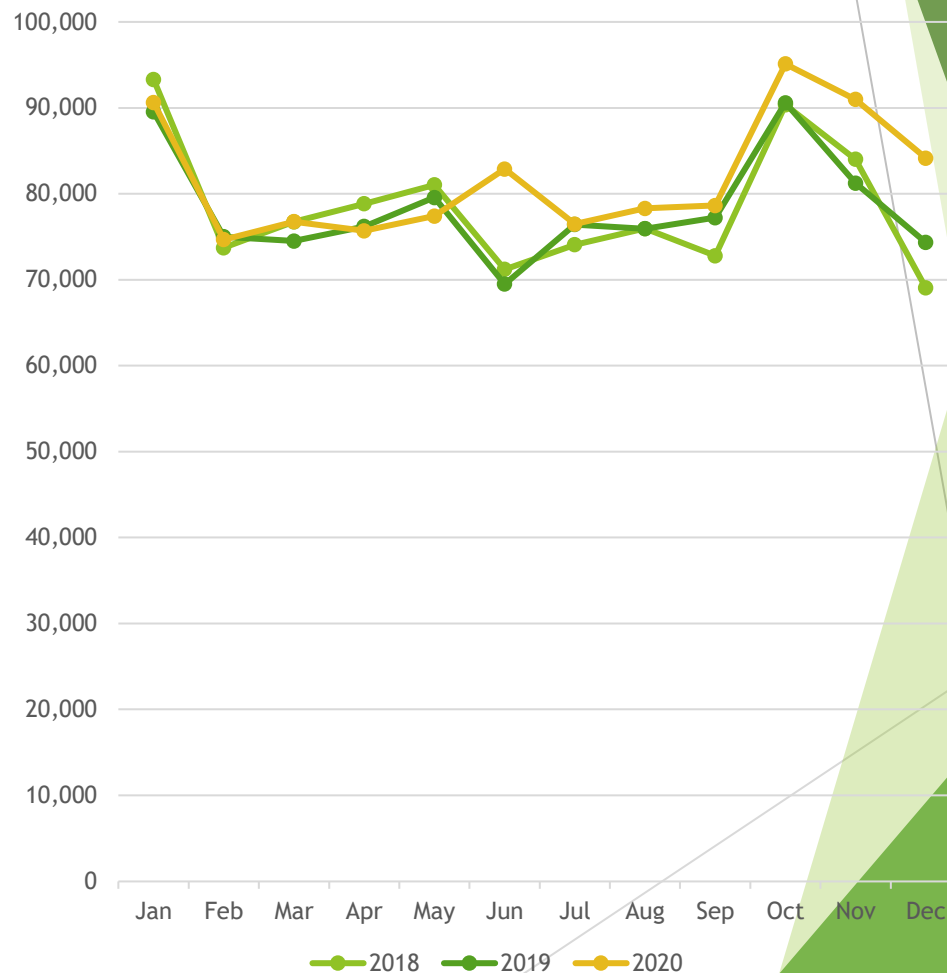
- ▶ For most of the indicators, the decline in coverage was seen from the period of lock down that occurred for the first three weeks in April 2020.
- ▶ The greatest reduction in utilisation of services was seen during the first reported cases through the lockdown period from March to April 2020
- ▶ The early response and the interventions put into place led to recovery in coverage of most of the key service indicators.
- ▶ At the end of the year, with the exception of total OPD attendance and admissions most of the other indicators have recovered from the decline.

# Achievements

Ghana Monthly Trend of Penta 3 Coverage for 2018, 2019 and 2020



Ghana Monthly Trend of coverage of ANC registrants for 2018, 2019 and 2020

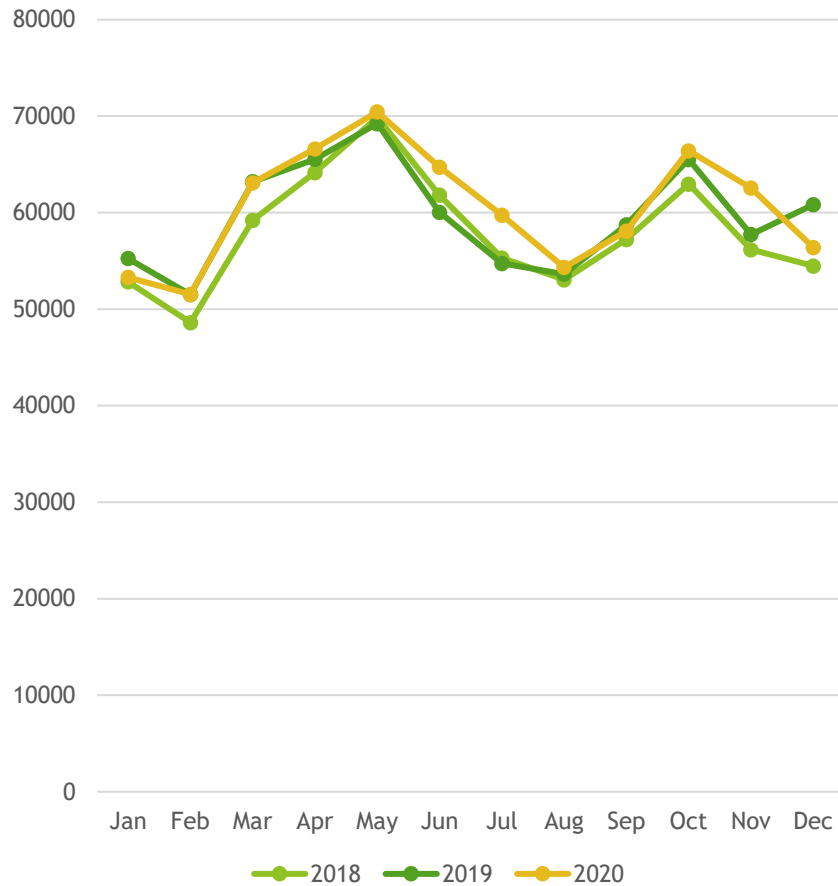


Source of Data- District Health Information Management System(DHIMS2)

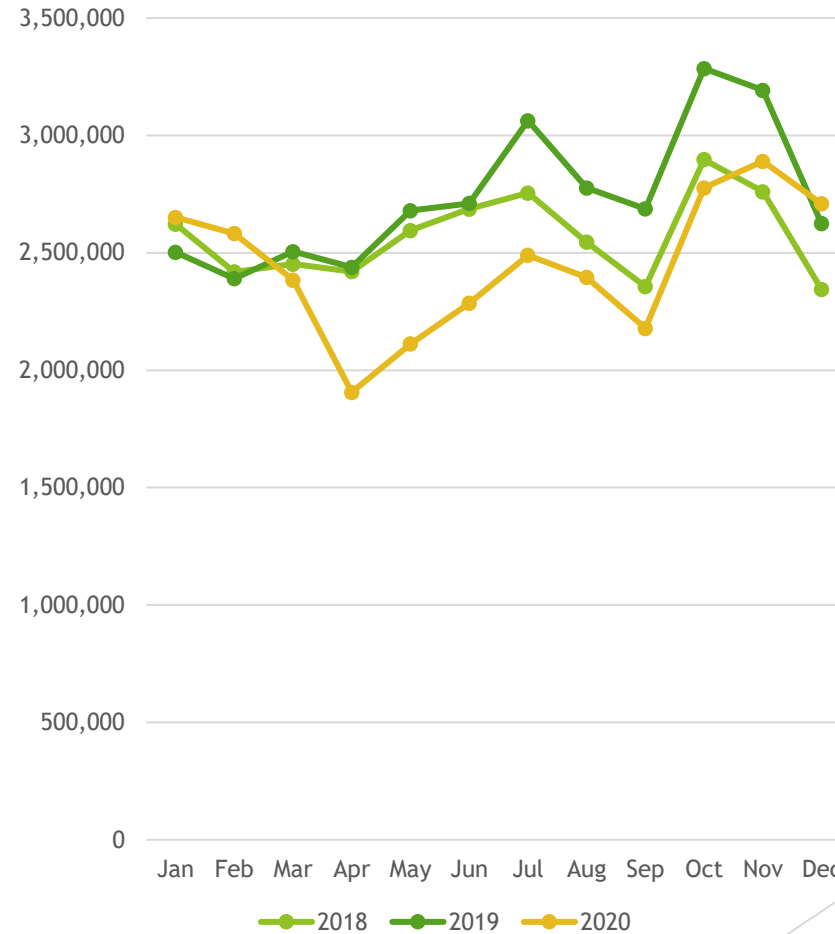


# Achievements

Ghana Monthly Trend of Total Deliveries in facilities for 2018,2019 and 2020



Ghana monthly trend of Total OPD attendance 2018,2019 and 2020



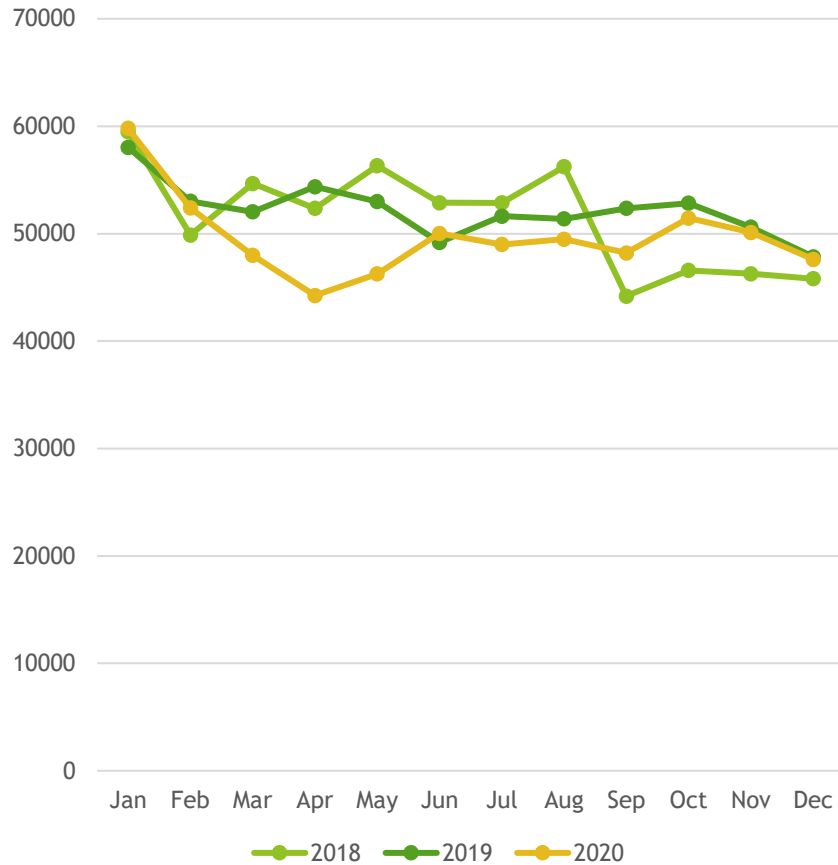
Source of Data- District Health Information Management System(DHIMS2)



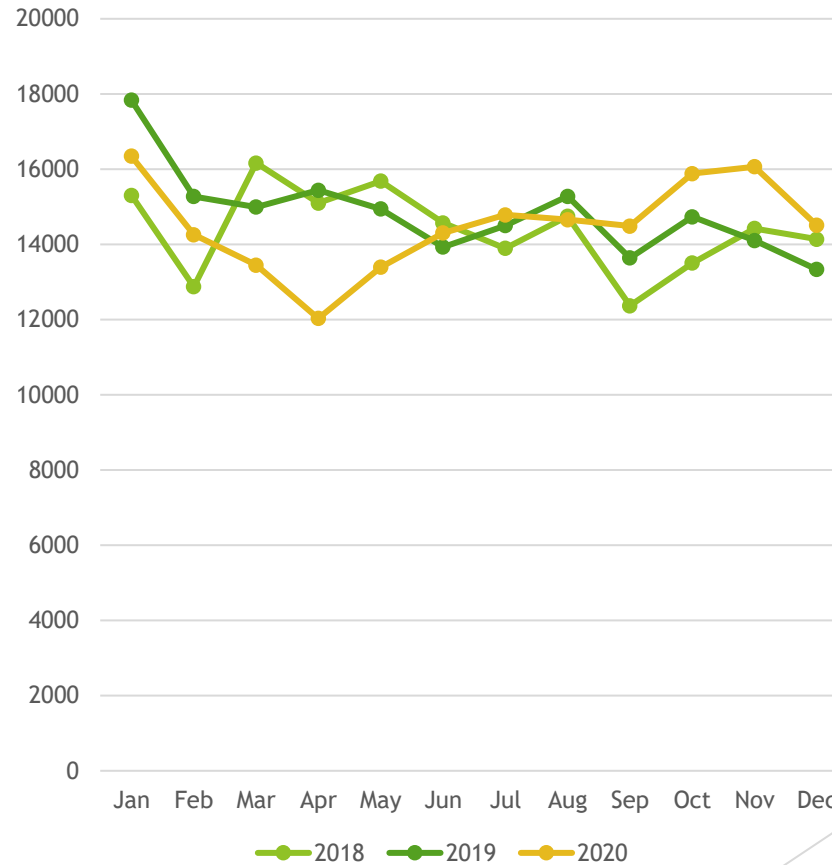


# Achievements

Ghana monthly trend of Total new Hypertension cases seen at th OPD ,2018,2019,2020



Ghana Monthly trend of total new Diabetes Mellitus cases seen at the OPD, 2018,2019 and 2020

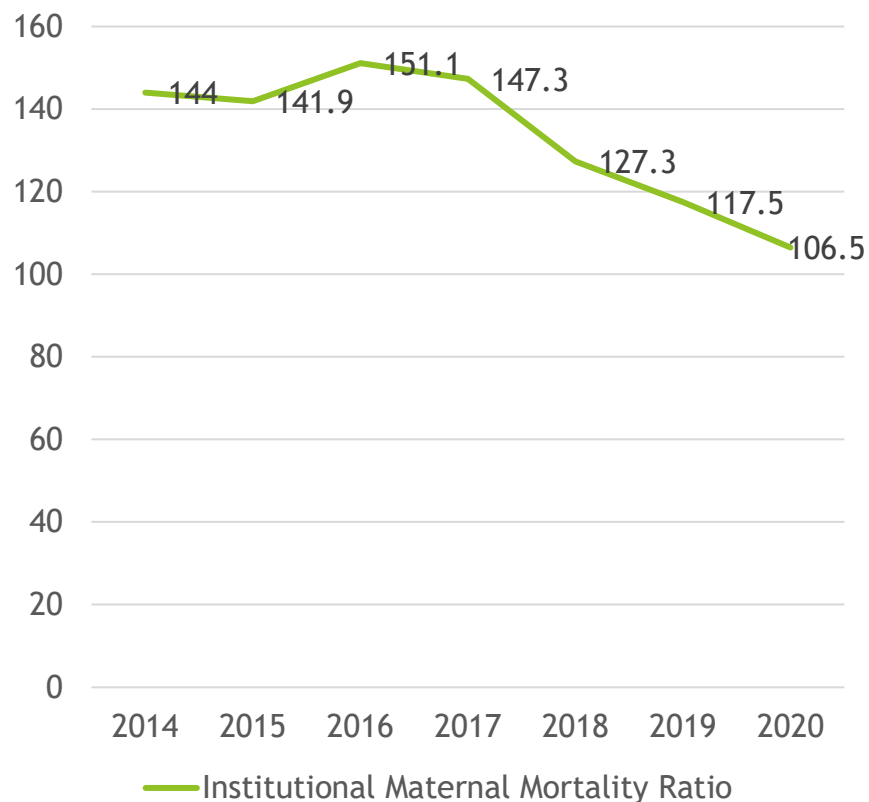


Source of Data- District Health Information Management System(DHIMS2)

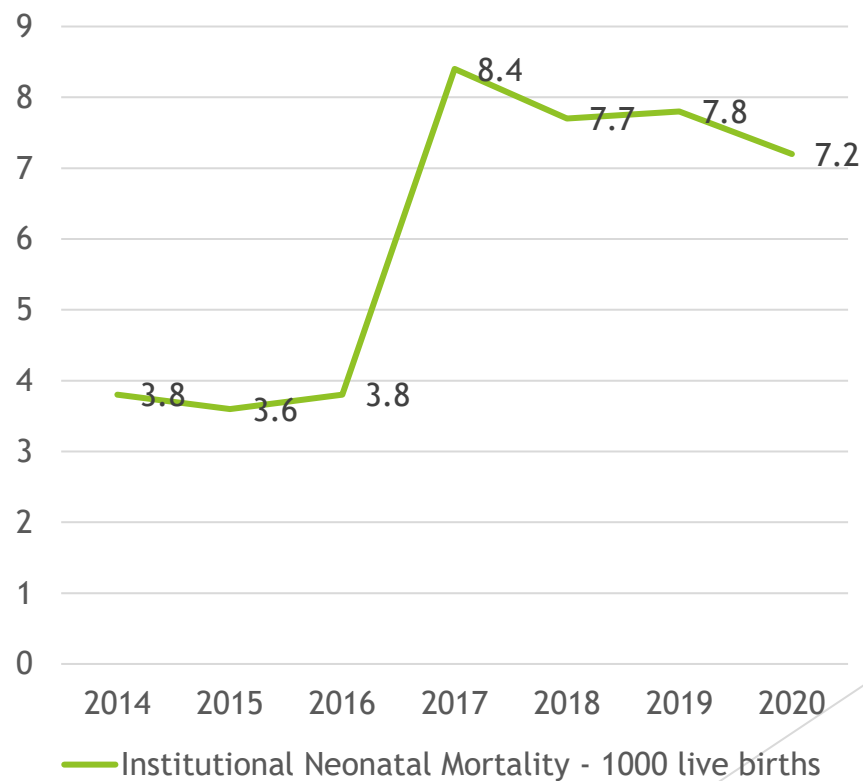


# Achievements

## Trend of Institutional Maternal Mortality Ratio in Ghana 2014-2020



## Trend of Institutional Neonatal Mortality - 1000 live births 2014-2020



**Source of Data- District Health Information Management System(DHIMS2)**

# Lessons learnt

- ▶ The health system of Ghana has shown surprisingly great resilience in handling COVID 19 and facilitating access to essential health services at the same time.
- ▶ Monitoring of key performance indicators is essential in recognising the declines in utilisation early enough to make response and interventions useful.
- ▶ Providing health workers with clear guidance on how to safely deliver essential health services based on how the disease causing the outbreak is spread is critical. It promotes confidence in the health workers who are providing the care and reassures the public to utilise the health services being provided.

# Lessons learnt

- ▶ Provision of PPEs is critical to getting essential services back on track
- ▶ Maintaining communication between the leadership and service providers is essential.
- ▶ Building trust in the population by providing information on services available in facilities and what is being done to guarantee their safety does facilitate essential service utilisation.
- ▶ Lock downs apart from its economic impacts has huge effect on utilisation of essential health services. Arrangement for offering the population essential health services should always be made if there is the need to go into lockdown during a pandemic.

# Conclusion

- ▶ The resilience of the health system is key to sustaining essential health service delivery during outbreaks.
- ▶ Putting into place a health system resilience assessment surveillance system that will provide information on a continuous basis on the state of the health system so that an optimal performance is always assured will be of great help in facilitating access to essential health services during disease outbreaks.