

The 2015 African Horse Sickness season: Report

1 September 2014 to 30 June 2015



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Introduction

African Horse sickness (AHS) virus is an Arbovirus from the Reoviridae Family. The virus is transmitted mainly by *Culicoides imicola* and *C. bolitinos*. AHS is seasonally endemic in the north eastern part of South Africa with seasonal epidemics spreading to the south and west of the country. The existence of endemic areas other than the areas described above could never be proven.

African Horse Sickness outbreaks are recorded from 1 September to 31 August of the next year for practical reasons to include all the outbreaks in a single summer season.

The 2015 AHS season: Climatic conditions

Favourable climatic conditions will increase the breeding and spread of the *Culicoides* vector. Periods of drought followed by heavy rains are particularly favourable for the field vector. AHS has both seasonal and cyclical incidence with outbreaks occurring mainly in late summer and autumn.

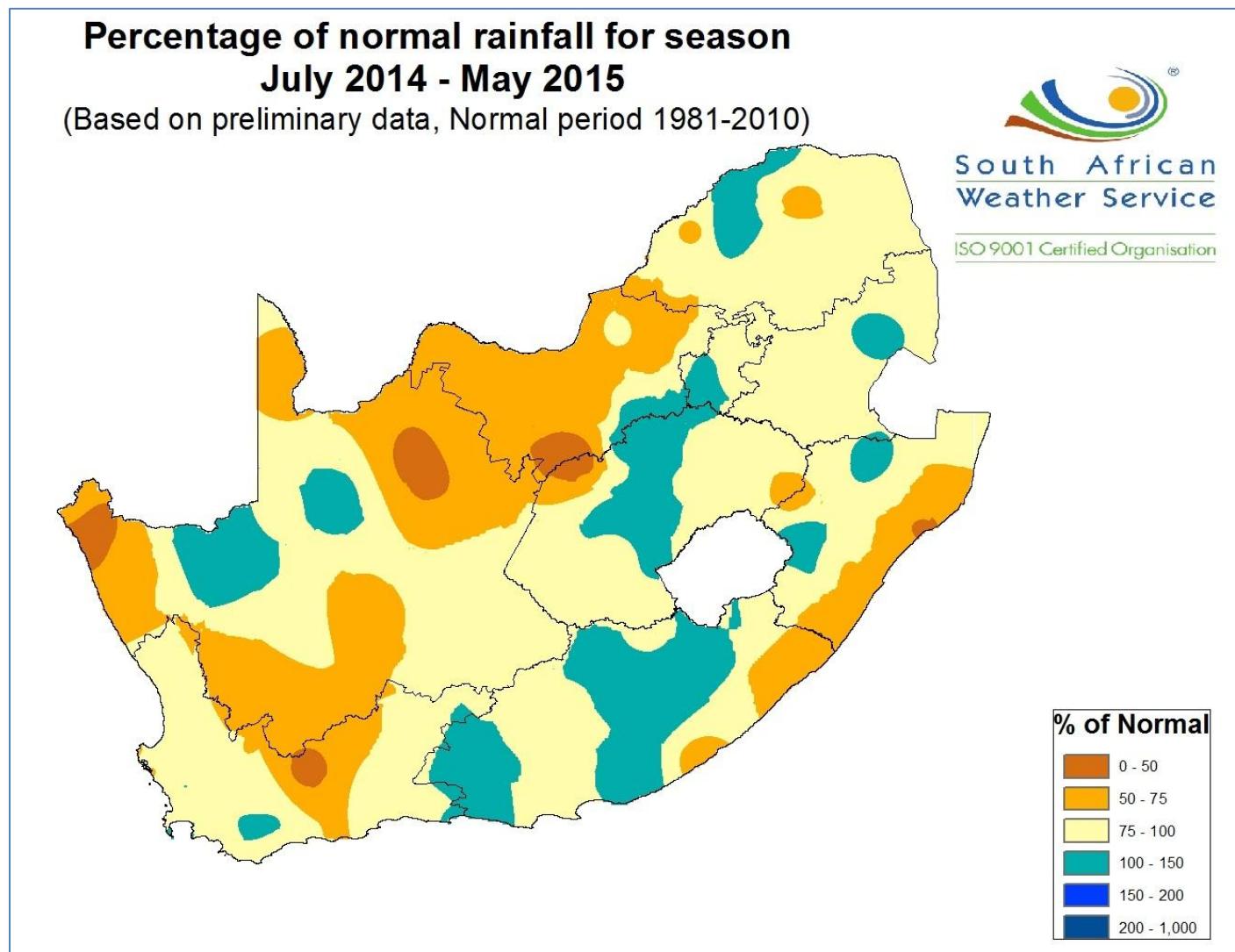


Figure 1: Percentage of normal rainfall for July 2014 – May 2015

Figure 1 indicates that large parts of the country received lower than average rainfall, particularly over large areas of KZN, Limpopo, North-West, Northern Cape and Western Cape. Very few areas received above average rainfall.

Laboratories involved in AHS diagnostics

Three laboratories supplied AHS test results to DAFF:

The Veterinary Genetics Laboratory: Molecular Diagnostics (University of Pretoria) is DAFF approved. An AHSV/Xeno Real-Time PCR is used to detect AHS virus. Serotypes are identified by a serotype specific RT-qPCR which is not yet DAFF approved.

The Biotechnology Laboratory (Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute) is DAFF approved and SANAS accredited. An AHSV hnRT-PCR is used to detect AHS virus.

Deltamune in Oudtshoorn is DAFF approved. A lightcycler PCR test is used to detect AHS virus.

Reported outbreaks

Passive surveillance depends on owners to report suspect cases to the veterinarian who then further investigates the case. All AHS outbreaks must be reported to the local state veterinarian. State veterinarians are required to report all outbreaks to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries on a SR1 report. The SR1 reports can either be emailed to Epidemiology@daff.gov.za or faxed to 012 319 7470.

Comparison of the number of reported AHS outbreaks for the previous AHS seasons

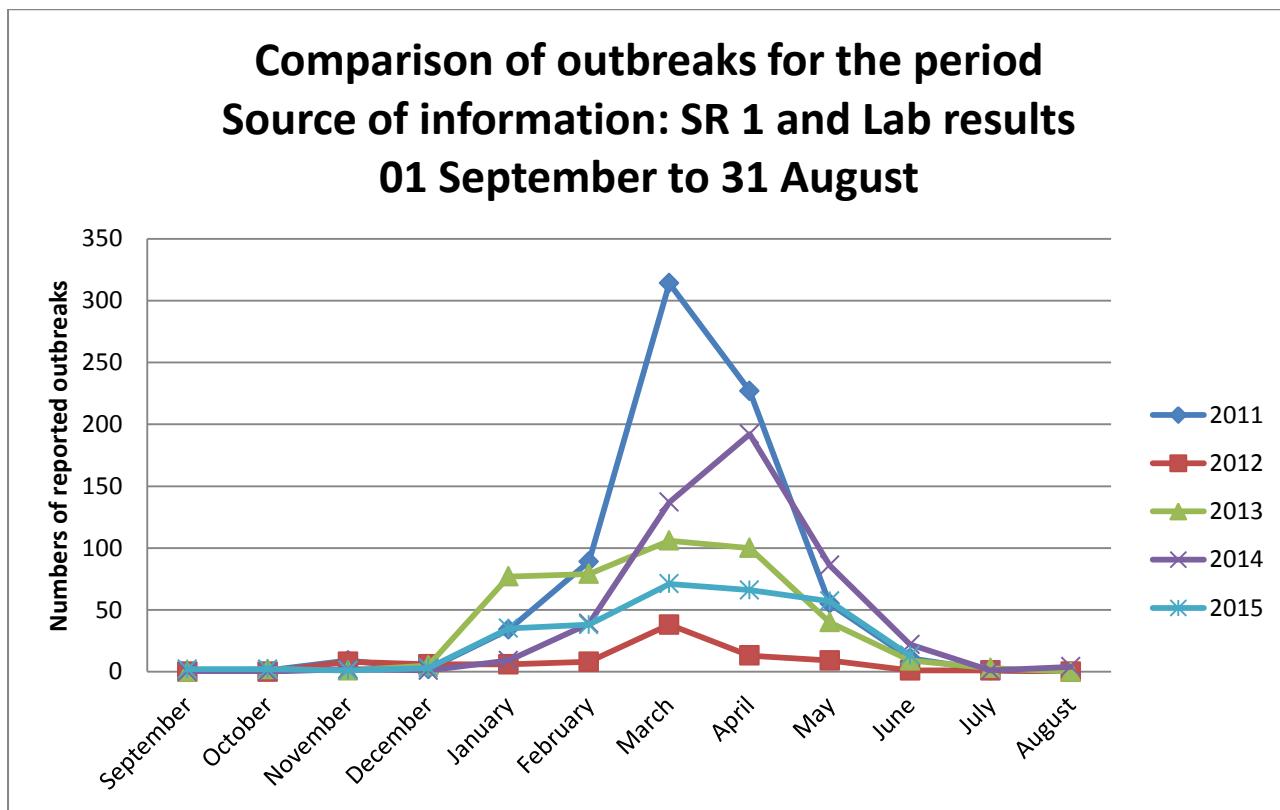


Figure 2: Comparison of the number of reported AHS outbreaks for the previous AHS seasons

The number of outbreaks for the period 1 September to 30 August of the years 2011 to 2015 is compared in Fig. 2. The 2012 season had the lowest number of AHS outbreaks whereas the 2011 season had the highest. The graph for 2015 extends only to current time (June). As can be seen in figure 2 there is generally a low occurrence of AHS in the 2015 season throughout the country.

Comparison of the number of AHS outbreaks that have occurred in various provinces for the current season based on SR1 reports and lab reports.

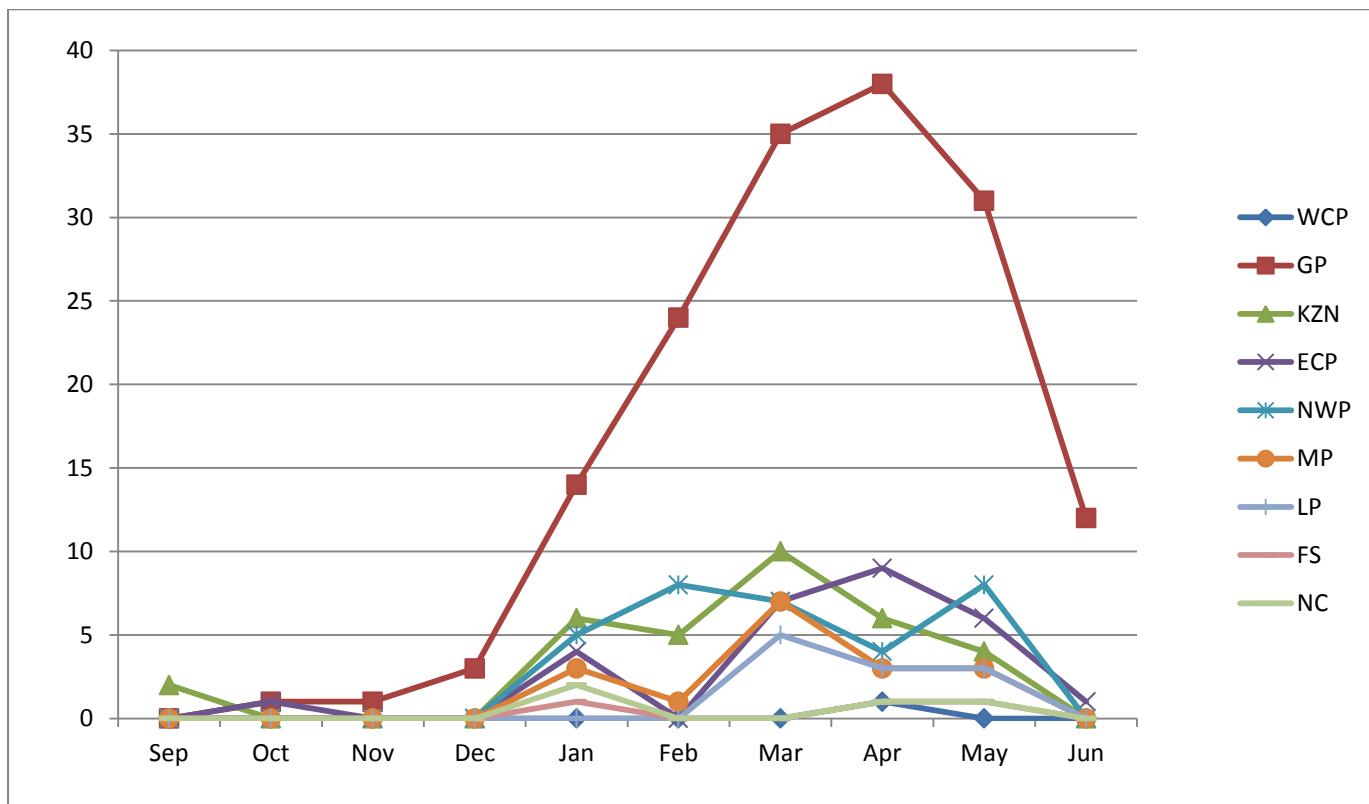


Figure 3: Comparison of the number of reported AHS outbreaks in each province from September 2014 – June 2015.

Figure 3 Illustrates the number of outbreaks for 9 provinces in the current AHS season based on Lab results and SR1 reports. Gauteng has the highest number of outbreaks from December 2014 to June 2015 compared to the rest of the provinces.

Table 1: African Horse Sickness outbreaks based on lab and SR1 reports received: September 2014 to June 2015

Province	Number of outbreaks reported with SR1 reports	Number of outbreaks reported without SR1 reports	Total number of outbreaks	Total number of disease related deaths based on SR1 reports only
Gauteng	69	90	159	20
KZN	21	12	33	2
North-West	18	14	32	4
Northern Cape	2	2	4	1
Western Cape	1	0	1	6
Eastern Cape	17	11	28	19
Mpumalanga	2	15	17	1
Free State	0	3	3	0
Limpopo	5	6	11	2
TOTAL (1 September 2014 to 31 May 2015)	135	153	288	55

This report was compiled using SR1 reports and compared to Lab results received

The table indicates the number of AHS outbreaks in each province based on SR1 reports and lab reports. According to the Animal Disease Act (35 of 1984) all AHS outbreaks must be reported. Only 47% of the positive locations were reported with SR1.

Cases that have been diagnosed with serology have not been included as it is difficult to determine if the false positives are as a result of vaccination.

African Horse sickness virus is divided into 9 serotypes that are known to be circulating in South Africa. Based on the lab results 3 serotypes were detected since the beginning of the current season namely Serotype 3, Serotype 6 and Serotype 8.

Comparison of all lab results and SR 1 reports for each province

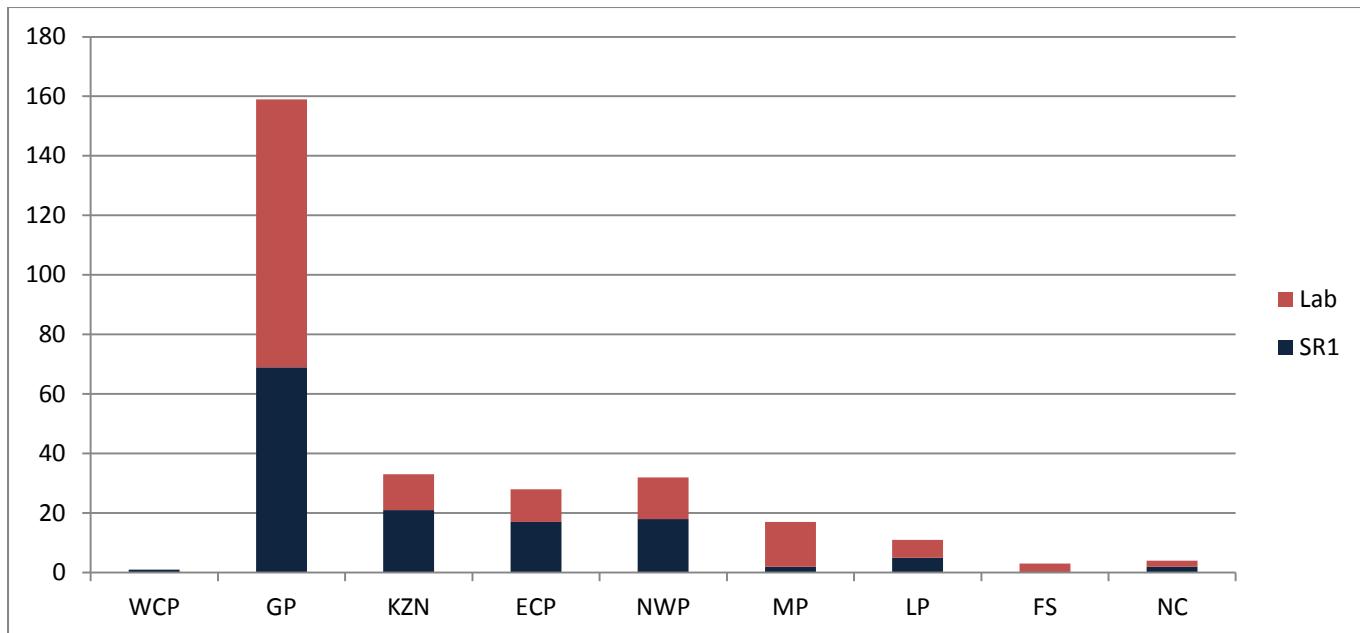


Figure 4: Comparison of the number of AHS outbreaks that were detected with lab results and SR1 reports

Figure 4 shows the number of positive AHS laboratory reports that were received (red). The blue bars illustrate the number of SR1 reports submitted by each province for the season. Western Cape Province reported 100% of their outbreaks with SR1 reports. Mpumalanga only reported 12% of their total outbreaks with SR1 reports. No SR1 reports were received from Free State.

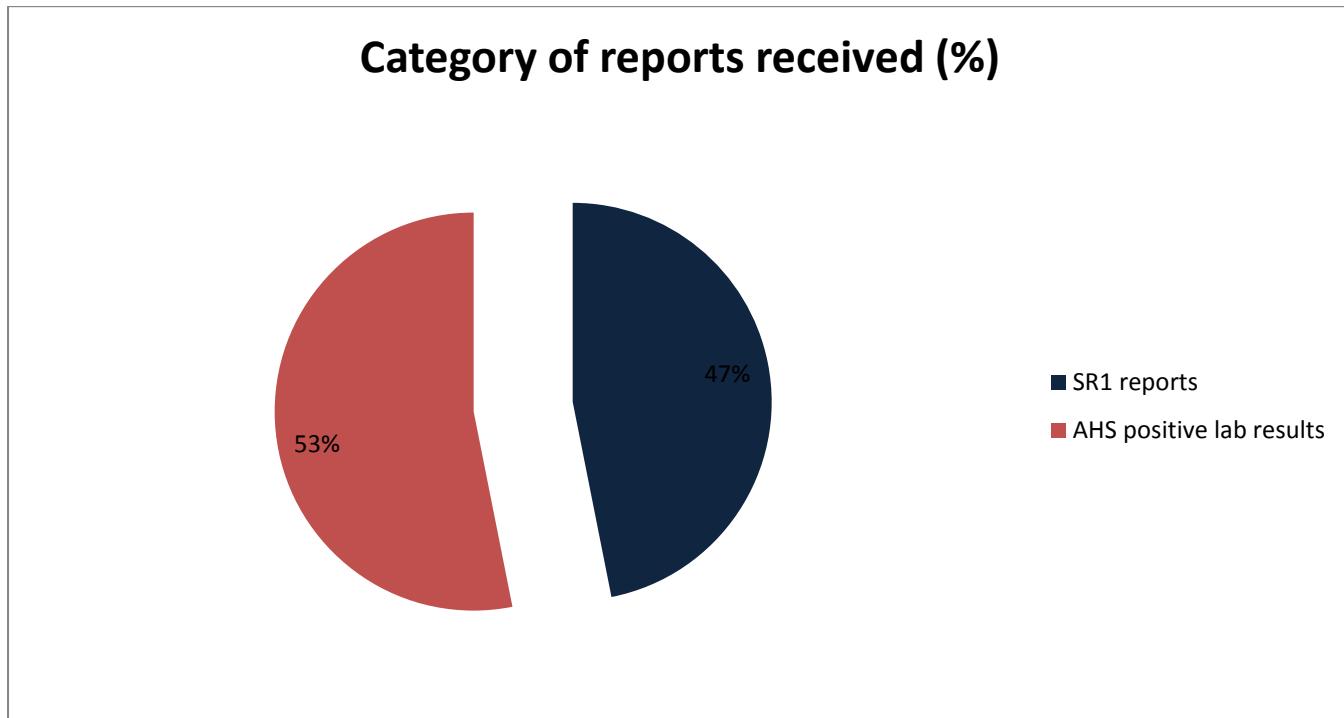


Figure 5: Categories of the detected outbreaks according to report status

Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of SR1 reports and lab results received from all the provinces. So far in the 2015 AHS season only 47% of all detected outbreaks were reported with SR1 reports countrywide as shown in the blue area. All positive locations that were reported with lab reports only are shown in the red section.

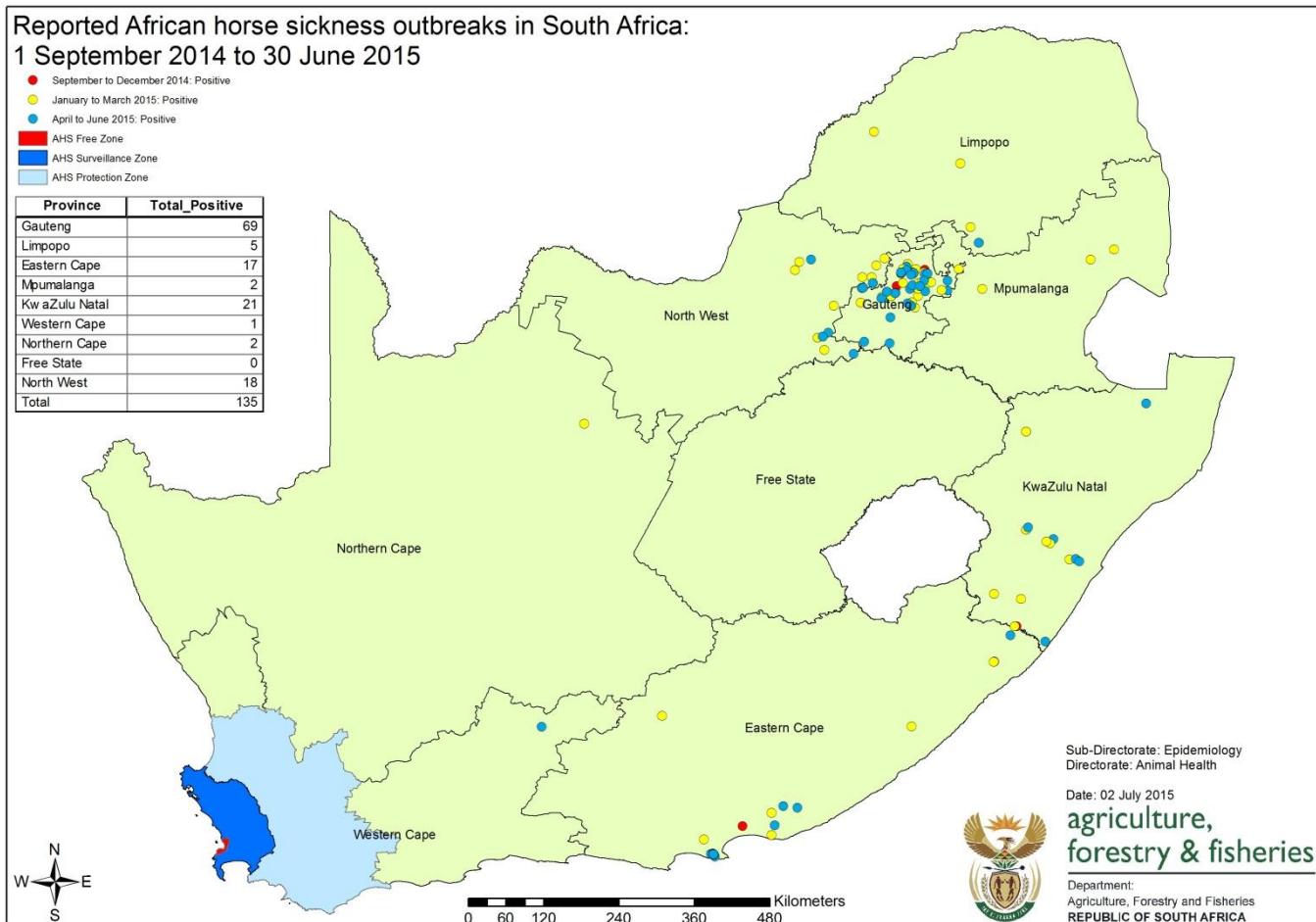


Figure 6: Reported number of AHS outbreaks in each province from September 2014 – June 2015

The number of outbreaks that have occurred in each province is illustrated in figure 6, based only on SR1 reports. Results only received from lab reports without SR1 reports do not appear on the map due to insufficient background information. Therefore 53% of all laboratory confirmed outbreaks (153) are not represented in figure 6. The province with the highest number of reported outbreaks was Gauteng Province. Northern Cape and Western Cape Provinces have the least number of reported outbreaks. No SR1 reports were received from Free State.

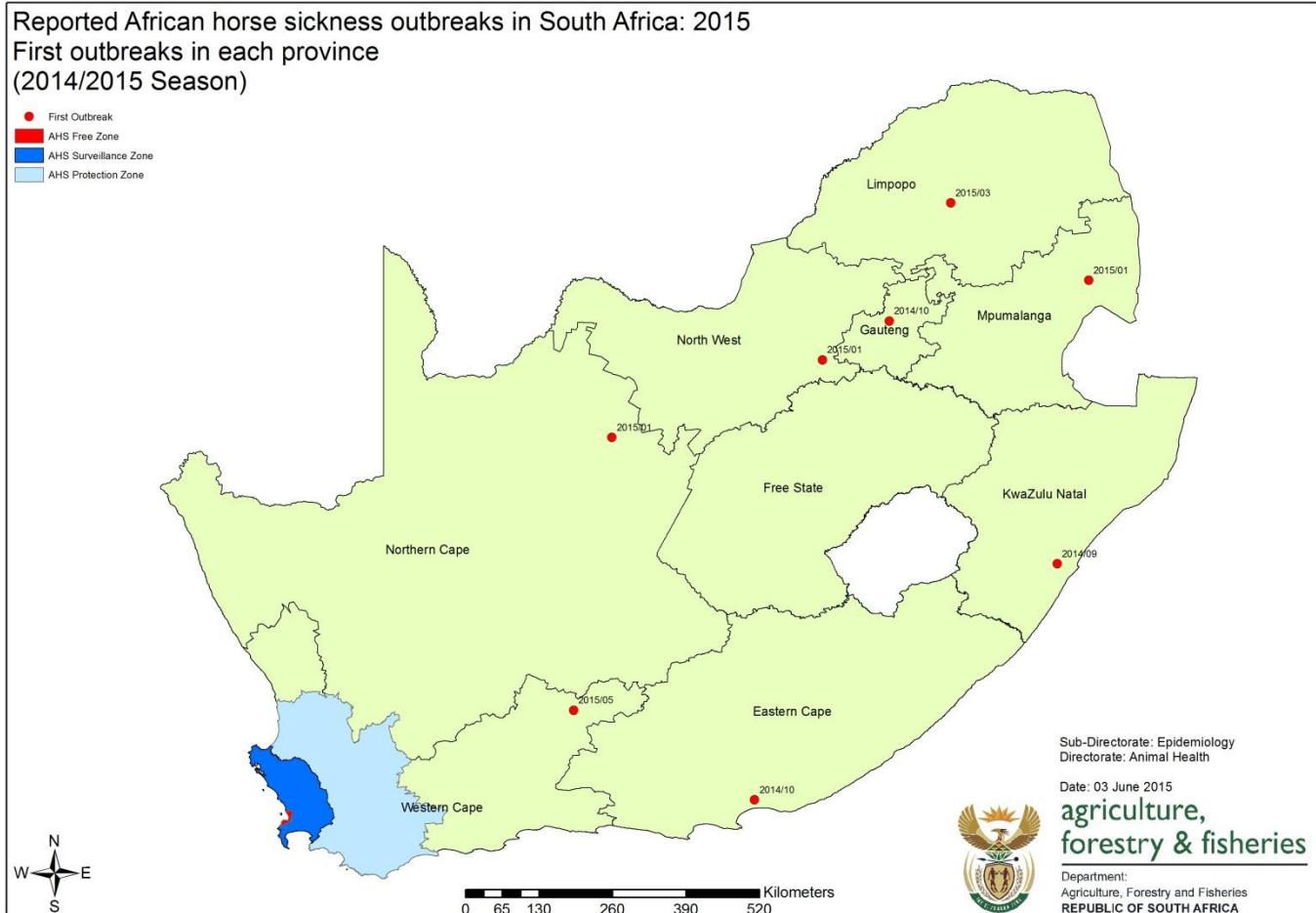


Figure 7: Reported number of initial AHS outbreaks for each province for September 2014 – June 2015

Figure 7 illustrates all the initial outbreaks for each province and the dates thereof based on SR1 reports only. KwaZulu Natal was the first province to report an outbreak in September 2014.

Precautions to limit outbreaks

Owners are encouraged to vaccinate their animals annually to limit the impact of the disease. All horses in RSA (except in the AHS free and surveillance zones in the Western Cape Province) must be vaccinated annually using a registered vaccine at the cost of the owner. The African Horse Sickness Vaccine from Onderstepoort Biological Products (Reg No, G116, Act 36 of 1947) is currently the only registered vaccine in terms of the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act, 1947 (Act No. 36 of 1947) and remains the only currently approved AHS vaccine in South Africa. According to the OBP AHS vaccine insert, it is important to administer the vaccine in the low vector activity periods when the likelihood of transmission is low preferably between 1 June and 30 October.

It is advisable to stable horses at least two hours before sunset and keep them stabled for at least two hours after sunrise. This is the time period when the *Culicoides* midges are most active and known to be feeding. As *Culicoides* midges also colonize around stagnant water sources, all efforts should be made to prevent such pooling of water and to move animals away from these sources.

To aid in the prevention of the AHS virus introduction into the AHS controlled areas of the Western Cape, all movements of equids to the AHS controlled areas are subject to strict State Veterinary movement control. Movement permits and valid identification of the equid will be required before movement. A health certificate must be obtained 48 hours prior to movement and the equid must be vaccinated 40 days prior to movement. For more information please contact your private veterinarian or State veterinarian Boland at 021 808 5253.

Regular testing and active surveillance of sentinel horses allows for early detection of clinical AHS outbreaks and even subclinical carriers in the Free and Protected zones. Sentinel animals are not vaccinated and are managed at fixed locations in order to detect any circulating infection among the herd. The OIE code requires ongoing surveillance to demonstrate freedom of disease in a country or zone. Owners play a crucial role in testing of sick animals. It is therefore important to educate horse owners about early disease detection and the importance of continuous surveillance.

Reporting of outbreaks

African horse sickness is a controlled animal disease in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act 35 of 1984). Reporting of AHS outbreaks to State Veterinary Services is compulsory according to the Animal Disease Act, 1984 (Act 35 of 1984). In case of a suspect or positive AHS outbreaks please contact the office of Provincial Director, Veterinary Services, if the contact details of the State Veterinarian are unknown. (<http://www.daff.gov.za/vetweb/Contacts/Contact%20list%20Provincial%20Directors.htm>).

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