

NEW HEALTH CRISIS LOOMS FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES

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Save the Children is warning that conditions are ripe for a devastating new health crisis in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh this coming monsoon season, which is expected to dump more than three metres of rain on the overcrowded and makeshift shelters.

More than 671,000 Rohingya have arrived in Cox's Bazar since August 25, 2017, including about 370,000 children, after a brutal military crackdown following attacks on Myanmar police border posts.

"The potential for a new and deadly health emergency is very real. A quarter of all toilets in the camps are expected to be damaged by the monsoon rains and half of all wells, with the mixture of overflowing human waste and floodwater a recipe for disaster," said Save the Children's Health Adviser in Cox's Bazar, Myriam Burger.

"We've already had outbreaks of measles and diphtheria and now, with extreme overcrowding, alarming levels of malnutrition among children under five and the monsoon on our doorstep, another health emergency is waiting in the wings."

Save the Children NZ Chief Executive Officer Heidi Coetzee said, "Any outbreak of disease would quickly claim the lives of thousands of malnourished children given current malnutrition levels, which exceed global emergency thresholds.

"We are asking the public step up and help the Rohingya people, particularly with the rainy season due to start in April," Ms Coetzee said. "New Zealand donors have given generously in recent times but the scale of need means that we must ask people to dig deep once again."

In Cox's Bazar district, the majority of monsoon rains – about 2.7 metres – usually fall between June and August, however heavy rains are common from April onwards. Cyclones are also a risk from mid-April to mid-June.

"Unless there is an urgent scaling up of preparation work, including strengthening of key infrastructure and the relocation of the most vulnerable families to safer areas, the upcoming weather is guaranteed to wreak havoc. We are going to see a large number of homes destroyed, roads and low-lying settlements flooded and bridges smashed as well as the likelihood of deadly landslides. It will create a disaster within a disaster, threatening the lives of thousands of children," Ms Burger said.

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To make a donation and save children's lives visit our website at www.savethechildren.org.nz or to donate over the phone call 0800 167 168 from Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

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