

YEMEN CHOLERA EPIDEMIC INFECTING ONE CHILD EVERY MINUTE



Media Release. Wellington, Friday 16 June 2017



A deadly cholera epidemic sweeping Yemen is spiralling out of control, with at least one child infected every minute, warns Save the Children.

The rate of infection has more than tripled over the past two weeks, and 46% of the estimated 5,470 new daily cases of suspected cholera/acute watery diarrhoea (AWD) are children under 15 years.

This means an average of 105 children are contracting cholera/AWD every hour – or one every 35 seconds.

More than 30 people a day are already dying, many of them children, and thousands could perish with up to 300,000 cases predicted in the coming months.

More than 2 million Yemeni children are acutely malnourished and they are particularly vulnerable, as their weaker immune systems are unable to fend off the illness.

Yemen is in the grip of a full-blown epidemic. But treating cholera is easy and inexpensive, providing patients can get the treatment they need.

Yemen's crippled infrastructure, food insecurity, failing economy and the ongoing war, mean many are unable to seek out help in time, with hospitals overwhelmed and short of supplies. The situation is particularly bad in more remote parts of the country with little or no access to health services. War, near-famine conditions and a complete breakdown in basic social services, including affordable transportation and access to clean water, are making the outbreak worse.

53-year-old Saleh told Save the Children of the difficulty getting his sick children to hospital:

“At first I took my children to a hospital in Abs [in Hajjah province] where they were given some pills and liquids...but we weren’t allowed inside because the hospital was full of sick people. So, we took a taxi to a hospital in Sana’a, more than 200km away. The most difficult thing has been the transportation. I had to pay £45 (nz\$80) to get a ride from my village to Abs. And then another £60 (nz\$106) just to get to Sana’a.”

Yemen’s health services can’t cope with the huge numbers of sick people presenting themselves with symptoms, including diarrhoea, vomiting and dehydration. Cholera is contagious and is spreading quickly because hospitals are not operating at full capacity. Some have been targeted by parties to the conflict.

Grant Pritchard, Yemen Country Director, Save the Children, said:

“Disease, starvation and war are causing a perfect storm of disaster for Yemen’s people. The region’s poorest country is on the verge of total collapse, and children are dying because they’re not able to access basic healthcare.

“Unacceptable restrictions on bringing aid and medical supplies into Yemen, including long delays accessing the main Hodeida port and the closure of Sana’a airport, make the fight to halt this deadly epidemic even harder.

“It’s time for the world to take action before thousands of Yemeni boys and girls perish from an entirely preventable disease.”

Notes to editors:

- As of the 13th June, **129,185 suspected cholera/acute watery diarrhoea cases and 942 deaths** have been registered in 20 of Yemen’s 22 governorates. More deaths are occurring in communities that cannot be reached due to insecurity. In the past week, there has been an average of about 5,470 new cases per day.
- Age and gender distribution – **46% of suspected cholera cases are children under 15 while 54% of the suspected cases are girls/women.**
- Since mid-March 2015, conflict in Yemen has spread to 21 of Yemen’s 22 governorates.
- The total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance is 18.8 million – or nearly 70 per cent of the population, including **10.3 million children** (UNOCHA, Yemen HNO 2017)
- According to UNOCHA, **8,010 people have been killed** and 44,538 injured (total casualties: 52,548) between March 2015 and 14 April 2017
- More than **6.2 million children** need protection assistance (UNOCHA, Yemen HNO 2017)
- 14.5 million people lack clean water and sanitation, including nearly **8 million children** (UNOCHA, Yemen HNO 2017)
- **4.5 million children and pregnant or lactating women** are in urgent need of nutrition services to treat or prevent malnutrition. This includes 1.1 million pregnant or lactating women and **2.2 million children** under the age of five who are acutely malnourished – of whom 462,000 children are severely acute malnourished

Save the Children's response:

In response to the cholera outbreak Save the Children is running four diarrhoea treatment centers (DTCs) and 20 oral rehydration therapy (ORT) corners. We plan to open an additional 12 DTCs and 85 ORT corners in the next two weeks. Our mobile medical teams are supporting hospitals with diagnosis and treatment, and providing hospitals with medical supplies and fuel to keep operating. We are providing clean and safe water and improving sanitation and hygiene practices to reduce the spread of the illness, including by running cholera prevention awareness sessions for adults and children.

Since the conflict escalated in 2015, we have been supporting 60 fixed health facilities and eight mobile health and nutrition teams across Yemen. Our health teams have consulted and treated 538,607 people including more than 279,000 children. We have treated 54,157 children under five years old for malnutrition, and supported more than 820,000 people to get food and income.

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