

Suspected cholera cases surge in Somalia as conflict and a multi-season drought displace more than 1.4 million people, many into camps lacking access to safe water and sanitation



A 3-year-old Somow lies stretched out on a cholera cot at Bayhow General Hospital in Baidoa,

Somalia, 21 March 2023. Credit: WHO/Somalia

BAIDOA, 17 May 2023 – Stretched out on a cholera cot, 3-year-old Somow defaecates directly into a bucket through a hole in a thin mattress. Since drinking contaminated water, he has been wracked by vomiting and violent episodes of watery diarrhoea.

“He fell ill earlier, and then it came back, that’s when I decided to seek treatment,” his mother, Nuney Ibrahim Yusuf explains, brushing flies from the young boy’s face and legs, at a cholera treatment facility in Baidoa, in southwest Somalia.

Somow is among an increasing number of patients with suspected cholera across Somalia, where forced displacement, poor sanitation and climate shocks are creating the perfect conditions for large-scale outbreaks of the disease.

Nationally, about 8 million people lack access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services in Somalia, where drought and insecurity displaced 1.4 million people in 2022.

Last year, WHO treated more than 130 000 cases of acute diarrhoeal disease – including 15 600 cases of suspected cholera in cholera treatment centres – the highest number in 5 years, although more cases likely went unreported in this Horn of Africa country owing to underreporting and other weakness in the disease surveillance system.

On his admission to the treatment centre at Bayhow General Hospital in Baidoa, doctors gave Somow oral and intravenous rehydration, and began treatment with antibiotics. He also received zinc supplements, which have been shown to reduce the severity and duration of diarrhoea in children suffering from cholera.

Displaced by insecurity and severe drought, the numbers of internally displaced people trekking to Baidoa reached 660 000 last year, nearly double the number in 2018. Most live in unsanitary conditions in dozens of informal settlements of fragile shelters built of sticks and covered with plastic and rags that ring the city.

“The latrines we have are full, there is nowhere to wash, and we have new people arriving,” says Abdulkadir Abdinur Adan, a community leader at the city’s Raama Cadey settlement, which is home to more than 1800 people. “Children have diarrhoea and there could be a cholera outbreak at any time. It is a great concern,” he adds.



© UNHCR/Photo: M. H. Ali. A makeshift settlement in Somalia, showing a lack of waste management infrastructure.





For more information, visit the WHO website at www.who.int/emro. Credit: WHO. Somalia - a transient centre at the end of the world, <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-2014-01>

Related links

Please see the links below for additional information:

[Acute watery diarrhoea/cholera situation report, Week 16, 17-23 April 2023](#)

<https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/somalia/documents/technical-programme-update-september-december-2022.pdf?ua=1>

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