

HEALTH BRIEF

13 February - 8 March 2023

Health Updates 13 February - 8 March 2023

COVID-19 updates



New cases

2 487

Cumulative cases

1 232 402



New deaths

36

Cumulative deaths

10 837

CHOLERA updates



New cases

0

Cumulative cases

6 744

New deaths

0

Cumulative deaths

23

Epidemiology situation - Based on MOPH data

A. Public Health Emergencies of International Concern

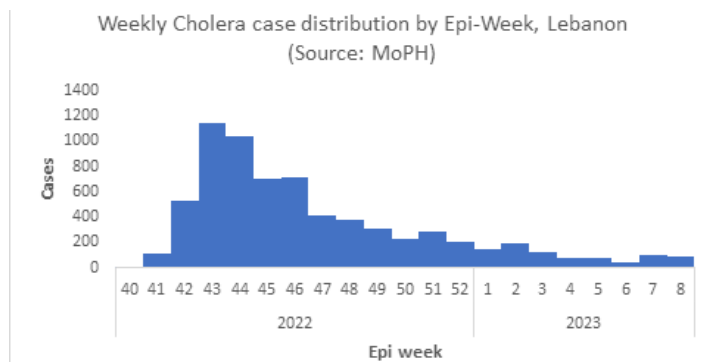


Figure 1: Distribution of suspected and confirmed cholera cases since the start of the outbreak

Cholera updates

- The multi-region cholera event was graded at the global level as grade 3, the highest possible graded emergency and the first cholera outbreak to be graded at level 3.
- Since mid-2021, the world is facing an acute upsurge of the 7th cholera pandemic characterized by the size and concurrence of multi-country outbreaks, the spread of cholera to non-endemic areas, and alarmingly high mortality rates
- In 2021, a total of 23 countries reported cholera outbreaks. In 2022, a total of 30 countries from 5 WHO Regions reported cholera outbreaks with at least 18 countries continuing to report cholera cases as of March 2023.
- Globally, the average CFR in 2022 was 1.9% (2.9% in Africa), the highest of the past decade and a significant increase from the acceptable average (<1%).
- Lebanon has experienced a cholera outbreak since October 6, 2022. Prior to this, the last cholera case in Lebanon was reported in 1993.
- Since the start of this outbreak, a total of 6,744 suspected cases and 671 laboratory-confirmed cases with 23 associated deaths, (CFR 0.34%) were recorded across the country. The last laboratory-confirmed cholera case was registered on January 5th, 2023, while the last cholera-associated death was registered on December 5th, 2022.

- The MoPH has been leveraging the support of both the trained RRTs and the capacitated central and peripheral laboratories to intensify investigation and confirmatory testing for suspected cholera cases.
- Over the past 3 weeks, there has been around 100 investigation missions per week in the hotspot areas of Akkar, North, Bekaa, and Baalbek Hermel with RDT positivity dropping close to 0% and none of the specimens selected for culture returning positive results.
- The most affected age group has been children less than 15 years of age, but adults are also affected.
- Nationally, over 80% of cholera cases have not required hospitalization, and these cases were managed at outpatient clinics or home. Cholera hospitalization in major referral hospitals peaked at more than 220 inpatients per day on epi week 42 (October 17) but has continued to drop since then with almost no daily hospitalizations since the start of 2023.
- Lebanon deployed Oral Cholera Vaccines through door-to-door campaigns starting November 17 (epi week 46), 2022. To date, over 1,151,800 people received one dose of cholera vaccine across all high-risk and priority areas. The MoPH and partners will continue to implement the OCV campaign in order to consume the remaining 350,000 doses.

COVID-19

- Globally, nearly 4.8 million new cases and over 39,000 deaths were reported during the last month, representing a decrease of 76% in incidence and 66% in mortality as compared to the previous month. Overall, over 758 million confirmed cases and over 6.8 million deaths have been reported globally since the start of the pandemic.
- Globally, recombinant Omicron variants XBB.1.5 (32.6%) and XBF (1.2%) are accounting for the majority of circulating SARS-CoV-2 specimens. Omicron BA.5 and its descendent lineages are accounting for 31.8% of shared sequences. The prevalence of Omicron BA.2 and its descendent

COVID-19 *continued*

lineages remained stable (13.7%). The remaining sequences were distributed among unassigned sequences, BA.1, BA.3, and BA.4

- In Lebanon, a total of 2,487 new COVID-19 cases and 36 associated deaths were reported during this reporting period. The highest COVID-19 incidence was reported from Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Over the past week, there has been 12 new deaths and the case fatality ratio stands at 0.87.
- In total, Lebanon has registered a total of 1,232,402 COVID-19 cases and 10,837 deaths since the start of the pandemic.
- On daily average for the past week, 17% of the ICU beds are occupied for COVID-19 patients.
- WHO is providing technical and financial support for the execution of the 4th round of the national seroepidemiological investigation protocol for COVID-19 infection.
- WHO continued to support Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) sequencing for COVID-19 at national level through the Center for Infectious Disease Research at AUB.
- MoPH procured and deployed the next generation COVID-19 vaccines, which are available in most of the vaccination centers.

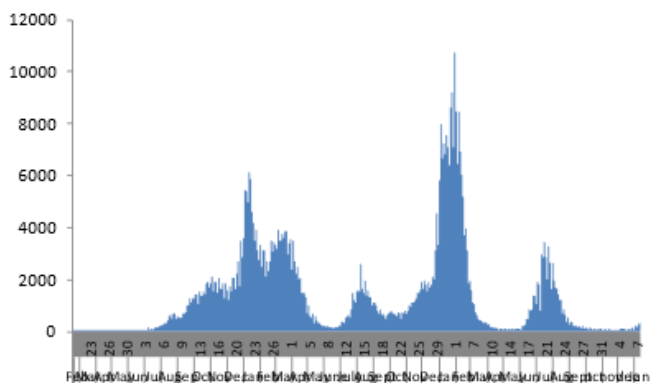


Figure 2: COVID-19 epi curve in Lebanon

Monkeypox

- Globally, there are 86,309 confirmed mpox cases, 107 associated deaths, and 110 countries reporting cases. In the EMR, there are so far 82 confirmed cases and 1 death.
- Throughout 2022, the MoPH in Lebanon has detected and reported 26 laboratory-confirmed cases of mpox. No mpox case was confirmed in the first two months of 2023.
- Among these cases, 58% were between 25 and 34 years old, 19% were between 35 and 44 years old, 15% were equal or great than 45 years old. One 8-year-old female has also tested positive.
- The majority of cases were reported among males with only 2 cases among females.
- Overall, 61% of cases identified as Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)
- WHO has supported the MoPH with relevant technical guidance and required laboratory supplies.
- WHO, with the support of USAID, continued to strengthen mpox surveillance and health education at community lev-

el by engaging with 5 selected local NGOs that will be integrating HIV and mpox activities among MSM in Lebanon.

- WHO continued to extend technical and financial support to the national reference laboratory at RHUH with essential human resources, laboratory reagents, and testing kits (targeted and commercial) for the mpox response.

B. Seasonal flu

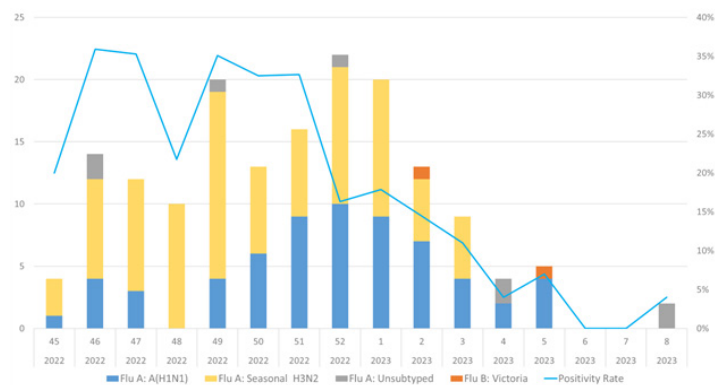


Figure 3: Number of specimens tested by influenza virus subtypes/lineages and percentage of specimens testing positive for influenza viruses in Lebanon from SARI/ILI sites (week 45, 2022 - week 05, 2023)

- From epi week 06 to 08 2023, the influenza sentinel network enrolled a total of 127 patients, out of which 125 were tested for both influenza and SARS-CoV-2. Of these tested specimens, 2 specimens were positive for influenza and 18 were positive for SARS-CoV-2.
- The influenza percent positivity has been steadily decreasing from 35% in week 49 2022 to 14% in week 02 2023, 11% in week 03 2023, and 4% in week 04 2023. The positivity rate is at 4% in week 8.
- WHO continues, through the PIP framework and the CDC influenza division, to support sentinel influenza surveillance sites through trainings, procurement of sample collection kits, and transportation of specimens.
- Lebanon has received support from Partnership for Influenza Vaccine (PIVI) under the Task Force for Global Health and will be receiving for a period of 3 to 5 years seasonal influenza vaccine doses along with necessary technical support to ensure system strengthening and a proper exit strategy.
- With the support of WHO and CDC, the MoPH was able to strengthen respiratory disease surveillance by re-activating SARI sentinel surveillance sites. Currently, there are 19 functional sentinel sites across the country: 13 Influenza-like Illness (ILI) and 6 Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI) sentinel sites which operate as per national guidelines by enrolling suspected cases and collecting specimens and sending them to the National Influenza Center (NIC) for laboratory testing.
- WHO will continue to support the MoPH in strengthening monitoring mechanisms of other respiratory diseases of epidemic and pandemic potential, starting with RSV among children under 5 years of age.

C. Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

Vaccine-preventable diseases remain a priority by the MoPH and WHO to ensure high coverage and completeness of routine immunizations, according to the national calendar for all children under 5 to avoid any potential outbreak of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPDs).

Measles

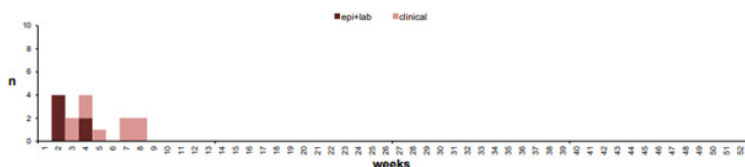


Figure 4: Number of suspected measles cases by week in 2023

- No new suspected measles cases were reported during this reporting period
- Since the start of 2023, 15 suspected measles cases were reported across the country. Of these cases, 6 were laboratory-confirmed. Of these cases, 33% were from Mount Lebanon, 27% from Nabatieh, 20% from Beqaa, 14% from Beirut, and 6% from Akkar.
- Overall, 33% of cases were between 1-4 years of age, 27% less than one, 20% between 5-9 years of age, 13% above 25 years of age, and 7% between 10-14 years of age.
- Overall, 67% of measles cases were zero dose individuals, i.e had not taken a single dose of measles-containing vaccines throughout their life course.

AFP surveillance and poliovirus circulation

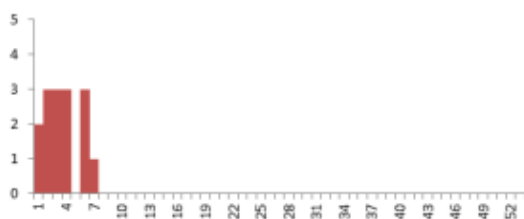


Figure 5: AFP cases by epidemiological week of onset

- During this reporting period, 6 new AFP cases were detected and reported.
- Since the start of 2023, the national surveillance system was able to detect 15 AFP cases, only one case of which was a zero dose cases, i.e case that had not taken any dose of polio-containing vaccine. These cases were distributed to Mount Lebanon (3), the North (1), Bekaa (2), Nabatieh (3), South (1), Akkar (2), and Baalbeck Hermel (3).
- The nationality of these reported cases were 73% Lebanese and 27% Syrian.
- WHO continues to support the MoPH with human resources for active AFP surveillance and transportation of specimens (AFP and ES) in all governorates of the country through 8 nurses and 8 drivers.
- WHO supported the MoPH with a two-week mission to review AFP surveillance, update AFP guidelines, meet with

the NCC chair and introduce the electronic reporting mechanism, and support with nOPV2 preparedness. The mission successfully achieved its objectives and submitted its recommendations to the MoPH which have included the need to: integrate disease surveillance, strengthen supportive supervision, re-prioritize active surveillance sites, improve sensitization and risk communication, document and train peripheral teams on the new guidelines, and strengthen linkages to available laboratory capacities.

- Although Lebanon has not detected and reported cVDPV2, it has been classified as a high-risk country for cVDPV2 introduction and has completed 11 out of 16 preparedness components. The pending items are related to safety monitoring and will be completed in the next few weeks.
- WHO continues to provide technical support to update the national immunization calendar .

D. Other communicable diseases

Meningitis

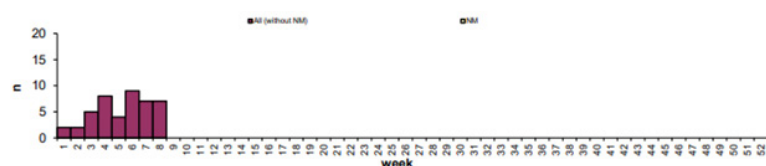


Figure 6: Meningitis cases over time

- During this reporting period, 23 new cases of meningitis were reported with no associated death
- Since the start of 2023, there were 44 reported cases of meningitis based on clinical presentation, and the most affected governorates based on incidence per 100,000 are Beirut, South, North, and Beqaa. These cases were distributed in the North (23%), Mount Lebanon (20%), South (18%), Beirut (16%), Beqaa (16%), Nabatieh (5%), and the rest unspecified.
- Upon further specimen testing (CSF and serum), 9 of these cases were classified as bacterial infection. Culture results showed 2 case of *S. pneumoniae*.

In past 20 years, the world has made notable gains in the health of women & girls. Still, 800 women die each day due to preventable complications of pregnancy & childbirth.

On #WomensDay, we reiterate our commitment to address the root causes of women's & girl's health disparities.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

WHO response

WHO Lebanon supports colon cancer awareness and screening



WHO representative in Lebanon Dr Abdinasir Abubakar took part in the launching of the National Colorectal Cancer Awareness and Screening Campaign at Ministry of Public Health organized by SAID NGO to mark the Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Health Minister Firass Abiad and participants from different health and medical syndicates lauded the efforts by SAID NGO to bring to the forefront the importance of early screening for colon cancer which is a serious and deadly disease ranking second after lung cancer.

The event focused mainly on early detection of colon cancer and prevention measures which include taking the FIT test (Fecal Immunochemical Test) that is available for free in many healthcare centers in the country.

“WHO is committed to working with the Ministry of Public Health, SAID NGO, and other partners to ensure that we provide required support to the people who are suffering from colon cancer and other types of cancers and more importantly to prioritize the preventive measures”, stated Dr Abdinasir.

WHO Lebanon staff receive Prevention and Response of Sexual Exploitations, Abuse and Harassment



A Prevention and Response of Sexual Exploitations, Abuse and Harassment workshop was carried out today for the WHO Lebanon staff members at the office’s training center as part of WHO’s efforts to create a safe working space for its staff and partners. The training was interactive and focused mainly on harassment in general and misconduct at work. The objective of this activity is to create a safe and friendly space for employees and to strengthen the reporting mechanism and its transparency. WHO strives to always ensure the safety and sound mental health of its staff. Health for all by all.

WHO trains MOPH Epi Surveillance team on POWER BI software



WHO Lebanon country office carried out a training on POWER BI software for the Ministry of Public Health’s Epidemiological Surveillance Team yesterday at the WHO training center.

The software is a surveillance tool that includes different features for data collection, visualization, and mapping. Six participants attended the two-day training to improve and strengthen their capacity regarding data analysis, visualization and mapping to better handle the digitalization of data in a more efficient manner. This training is part of the task of the Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) Surveillance mission at the country level.

The objective of this AFP surveillance mission is to be able to review the field operations, to update the guidelines, to finalize the novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (NOPV2) preparedness, and to meet with the chair of the national certification committee to discuss standard operating procedures (SOPs), organogram and deliverables.

WHO trains MOPH Medical Prevention unit on Logistics Management System software



WHO carried out a training session on the Logistics Management System software (LMS) for the medical prevention department team at the Ministry of Public Health last Thursday 16 February 2023 at the WHO training center. The team of 25 participants covered ten public hospitals. This is a refresher training which is carried out once every six months.

The LMS is a software that helps manage all medication that is distributed through the MOPH by creating a route for each drug’s trip from the purchasing to the warehouse until it reaches the beneficiaries.

So far the LMS software is implemented at over 90% of drug distribution centers in the country covering the following areas: catastrophic, TB, HIV and chronic medication center. In addition to MOPH drug centers, Coop warehouse started lately to use the LMS to monitor drug distribution for civil service patients. The software and training are covered with generous funds from the European Union in Lebanon.

WHO response

WHO conducts training on Prevention of Sexual Exploitations, Abuse and Harassment for MOPH ESU staff



Strengthening protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment is a shared responsibility of the humanitarian and development community, including both WHO and its partners. In line with that, WHO conducted a capacity building training on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) in Radisson Blue Martinez Hotel for 23 participants from the Ministry of Public Health from the Epidemiological Surveillance Unit (ESU) and Preventive Medicine unit. The session focused on main on the definition and difference between sexual, exploitation, abuse and harassment, and their root causes and consequences. Exercises were conducted to demonstrate how power differences play a role in contributing to sexual misconduct. There will be a further three training sessions for other groups from the Ministry of Public Health in different regions in the country. WHO strives to always ensure a safe work place. Health for all by all.

WHO team monitors distribution of medications at PHCs



WHO team visited Primary Health Care centres in the South region to monitor the distribution and dispensing of the essential medications made available with support from the European Union in Lebanon and ECHO funds. "This support is filling critical gaps in ensuring access to medications for the most vulnerable especially in the context of the current crisis", said one of the centres' director. WHO support to essential medications is in close collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health Lebanon PHC department. Findings from the monitoring visits are discussed with the MOPH field coordinators for continuous improvement.



WHO Lebanon published online the [Country Cooperation Strategy for WHO and Lebanon](#), updated version, 1 June 2022 – 30 December 2023

International Women's Day

On #InternationalWomensDay, we celebrate the female health care workers who overcome all barriers no matter the place or time, because they believe that everyone deserves dignified health care.



WHO Global response

Countries begin negotiations on global agreement to protect world from future pandemic emergencies



Countries of the World Health Organization have begun negotiations on a global accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, using the “zero draft” as a basis for negotiating an agreement to protect nations and communities from future pandemic emergencies.

Ending Friday, discussions on the draft pandemic accord took place during the weeklong fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB), which includes WHO’s 194 countries. Negotiations on the draft will continue over the next year according to a timetable laid out by the World Health Assembly.

Mr Roland Driec, Co-Chair of the INB Bureau, from the Netherlands, said: “The start of discussions of concrete language for the WHO pandemic accord sends a clear signal that countries of the world want to work together for a safer, healthier future where we are better prepared for, and able to prevent future pandemic threats, and respond to them effectively and equitably.”

Fellow INB Bureau Co-Chair, Ms Precious Matsoso of South Africa, said: “The efforts this week, by countries from around the world, was a critical step in ensuring we do not repeat the mistakes of the COVID-19 pandemic response, including in sharing life-saving vaccines, provision of information and development of local capacities.”

Ms Matsoso added: “That we have been able to move forward so decisively is testimony to the global consensus that exists on the need to work together and to strengthen WHO’s and the international community’s ability to protect the world from pandemic threats.”

WHO Member States will continue negotiations of the zero draft of the pandemic accord at the INB’s next meeting, to be held over 3-6 April, with a view to collecting all inputs necessary to develop the first draft. [Read full article.](#)

WHO Lebanon would like to thank the support of all partners and donors who have and are still contributing generously and directly to the WHO health response. Together health for all by all.



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