

HEALTH BRIEF

20 December - 3 January 2024

COVID-19 Updates during the reporting period



New cases

126

Cumulative cases

1 249 425



New deaths

0

Cumulative deaths

10 984

Epidemiology situation - Based on MOPH data

A. Tension in South Lebanon

- Ongoing clashes continue to escalate along the Lebanon-Israel border with increased targeted attacks in southern Lebanon. This has led to:
 - 590 persons wounded and 132 killed within or outside of referral hospitals as of 3 January 2024, as reported by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).
 - 76,018 individuals becoming internally displaced as of 2 January 2024 (IOM). Of these, 1,082 (1.42%) are staying in 14 collective shelters and others have made their own accommodation arrangements.
- WHO has been working with the MoPH and partners to scale up the preparedness and response capacities to the ongoing emergencies, and some of the key achievements are as follow:
 - Continued to support the operationalization of the Public Health Emergency Operation Centers (PHEOC) to coordinate and support preparedness and response activities.
 - Facilitated the rapid hospital assessment of additional 41 hospitals in the South, Nabatiyeh, Baalbeck-Hermel, Beirut, and a few hospitals in Mount Lebanon as part of hospital preparedness and readiness. Of the 41 hospitals assessed, 8 have been identified as frontline referral hospitals. WHO has prepositioned supplies for trauma care in these hospitals.
 - Facilitated a new phase of assessment covering public and private hospitals in Zahle and Aley, which will serve as a backup for frontline hospitals in case of an escalation.
 - Supported series of capacity building training in mass casualty management, clinical trauma care and management of psychiatric emergencies and basic psychosocial support.
 - Over 3,092 health workers in 125 hospitals have already received training on the clinical care of trauma patients. In addition, 40 hospitals have been covered by the mass casualty management training.
 - Procurement and prepositioning of emergency medical supplies for trauma and surgery to referral hospitals, and other supplies to the MoPH central drug warehouse.

- Continued to strengthen the early warning surveillance system for timely detection, confirmation, and response to potential outbreaks of epidemic-prone diseases.
- Supported the improvement of basic essential health services through PHCCs to ensure the continuity of primary health care services and expand the services to newly displaced population.

B. Acute Respiratory Infections

1- COVID-19

- COVID-19 is still a public health threat that needs to be monitored and addressed, even though it is no longer classified as a public health emergency.
- Globally, the number of new cases increased by 52% during the 28 days of 20 November to 17 December 2023 as compared to the previous 28-day period, with over 850,000 new cases reported. The number of new deaths decreased by 8% as compared to the previous 28-day period, with over 3,000 new fatalities reported.
- As of 17 December 2023, over 772 million confirmed cases and nearly seven million deaths have been reported globally.
- There is no more recent update on COVID-19 due to the delay in reporting by Member States to WHO.
- In Lebanon, a total of 126 new COVID-19 cases with no associated deaths were reported during this reporting period. The severity, hospitalization, and deaths due to COVID-19 remains low. The positivity rate was 4.1%. The case fatality ratio stands at 0.88. In the past two weeks, the ICU COVID-19 occupancy rate at referral hospitals was 7%.
- As of 27 December 2023, Lebanon has registered a total of 1,249,425 COVID-19 cases and 10,984 deaths since the start of the pandemic.
- WHO continues to support Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) for SARS-COV 2 at the national level through the Center for Infectious Disease Research at AUB.

B. Acute Respiratory Infections *continued*

1- COVID-19 *continued*

- At the national level, COVID-19 vaccine coverage remains at 50.4% for the first dose, 44.4% for the second dose, and 27.6% for the third dose.
- WHO continued to support ESU to maintain a strong surveillance system to detect cases and monitor COVID-19 hospitalization and deaths.

2- Integration of seasonal influenza and other respiratory disease surveillance

- WHO continued to support the MoPH to strengthen seasonal influenza preparedness and response capacities at the national level in preparation for the upcoming 2023/2024 season. These supports are currently included:
 - Improvement of data processes, interoperability, and data flow through building capacities to use R software.
 - The drafting of a national influenza vaccine deployment plan in joint collaboration with the MoPH.
 - Initiating procurement of essential test kits and other reagents for typing and subtyping.
 - Continue to build the capacity of health workers at SARI/ILI sentinel sites.
 - Field visits to SARI/ILI sentinel sites to monitor the influenza surveillance program and propose corrective measures to improve specimens collection.
 - Documenting successes and lessons learned from the SARI sentinel sites reactivation in the 2022/23 season.
- With the support of WHO, the MoPH continued to monitor the circulation of influenza viruses. During this reporting period, 236 specimens have been collected from ILI/SARI sentinel sites. Based on data obtained from the National Influenza Centre (NIC), between Epi-weeks 49 and 51, a total of 429 patients were enrolled through the ILI/SARI sentinel network and 429 (288 specimens from ILI sites and 141 specimens from SARI sites) were processed for influenza and SARS-CoV-2 testing. The results showed that 156 specimens were positive for seasonal influenza virus, with influenza A(H1N1) the most predominant influenza subtype reported, and 12 specimens were positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- Ahead of the 2023/24 influenza season, the MoPH in Lebanon received 10,000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccine from the Partnership for Influenza Vaccine Introduction (PIVI) under the Task Force of Global Health (TGH). The vaccination campaign that started in October is still in progress targeting high-risk groups including health workers, elder people, and people with co-morbidities. Most vaccine doses were distributed across different vaccination sites including:
 - Primary Health Care Centers (PHCCs) - targeting 3,478 healthcare workers.
 - Elderly homes – targeting 1,920 healthcare workers and elderly people.
 - Public hospitals – targeting 1,123 healthcare workers.

- Children with chronic conditions receiving care at university medical centers.
- Dialysis centers – targeting 445 dialysis patients.
- Karageuzian and Dar El Hawraa PHCs – targeting elderly patients with chronic conditions.

C. Food and Waterborne Diseases

- In view of recent displacement and population movement, WHO together with MoPH in Lebanon has been strengthening water-borne disease surveillance for timely detection and confirmation of potential cholera or other water-borne pathogens. There are ongoing efforts to assess potential sentinel sites to monitor AWD and other water-borne diseases. Upcoming work will include training of personnel and initiation of specimen enrollment mechanisms.

1- Cholera/Acute Watery Diarrhea

- WHO and the MoPH are constantly monitoring AWD cases with high vigilance, and there are no reported suspected or confirmed cholera cases during this reporting period. MoPH together with WHO are scaling up the cholera preparedness and response capacities, while leveraging and sustaining the gains made during the cholera outbreak.
- Active early warning surveillance is also ongoing through existing EWARS reporting sites and field missions of trained RRTs to areas with reported AWDs and transportation of specimens to the capacitated central and peripheral laboratories for investigation and confirmatory testing. With the support of WHO, the MoPH in Lebanon have created a sentinel surveillance network to help monitor and test AWD cases and identify the circulating pathogens of concern.
- Cholera remains a significant public health concern in Lebanon and MOPH and partners will continue to sustain effective preparedness and response capacities as the risk of another cholera outbreak is high.

2- Hepatitis A

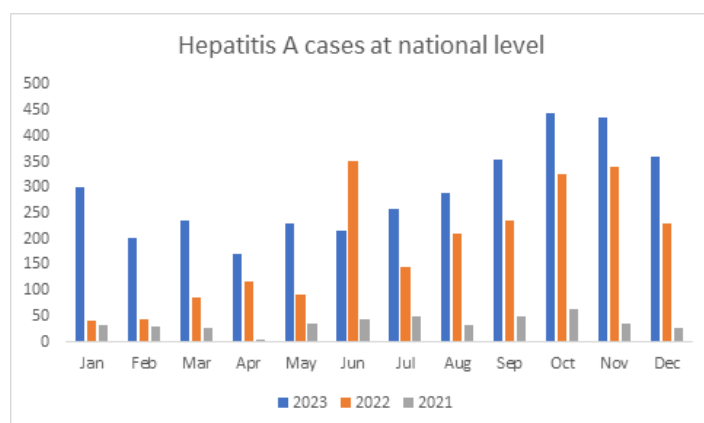


Figure 1: Number of suspected Hepatitis A cases by month for past 3 years

EPI situation *continued*

- During this reporting period, a total of 150 new suspected hepatitis A cases were reported.
- There are no active clusters among displaced populations.
- Since the start of 2023, a total of 3,500 suspected Hepatitis A cases have been reported from health facilities across the country, of which 32.7% have been reported among 10-19 years old, followed by 27.4% among 5-9 years old, and 25% among 20-39 years old.
- Suspected Hepatitis A cases were distributed in North (2,255), Beqaa (694), Mount Lebanon (184), South (121), Nabatieh (101), Beirut (39), and unknown (106).
- The MoPH surveillance team continued to monitor the epidemiological situation of food and waterborne diseases at public and private facilities across the country.
- Coordination is ongoing between the surveillance and WASH sectors to ensure suspected cases of water-borne diseases are detected and appropriate WASH interventions are implemented.
- MoPH is collaborating with other lines ministries to enhance the water and sanitation conditions in high-risk areas, including awareness-raising campaigns and promoting chlorination.
- Since the start of 2023, a total of 351 suspected measles cases were reported at national level. Among these cases, 189 were lab-confirmed cases.
- Further analysis of the available data indicated that Baalbeck Hermel district has the highest measles attack rate, while 0 - 4 age group has the highest attack rate, followed by the 5-9 age group.
- Overall, 77% of measles cases reported were zero-dose children, which means those children had not taken a single dose of measles-containing vaccines throughout their life course.
- WHO supported the MoPH in conducting a measles risk assessment where out of 26 districts in total, 15 were found to be at very high risk, 5 at high risk, another 5 at medium risk, and 1 as low risk for measles outbreak. WHO will continue supporting the MoPH to enhance the surveillance and disease outbreak investigation and response as part of the overall emergency preparedness and response measures.
- In efforts to improve early detection and reporting, WHO supported the MoPH in conducting 25 training sessions targeting 919 health workers across all central and peripheral hospitals and medical centers in the country to improve the use of measles case definition and reporting up to central level.

D. 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).
- WHO is also supporting the strengthening of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) for better definition of roles and responsibilities and improved access to tools and resources for evidence generation and translation into recommendations.

1- Measles

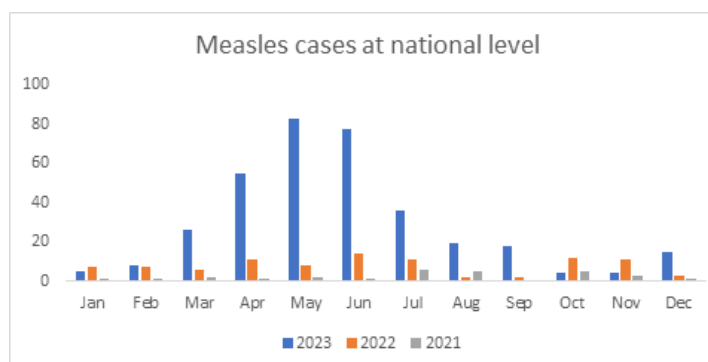


Figure 2: Number of suspected measles cases by month for past 3 years

- During this reporting period, a total of 6 new suspected measles cases were reported from Bekaa (1), Mount-Lebanon (1), South (1), and North (3). The new suspected cases affected various age groups, and 7 of these suspected cases were unvaccinated.
- There are no active clusters among displaced populations.
- The MOPH surveillance team conducted a series of field investigations for the reported suspected cases, and blood samples were collected and sent to the central laboratory for confirmation.

2- Poliovirus

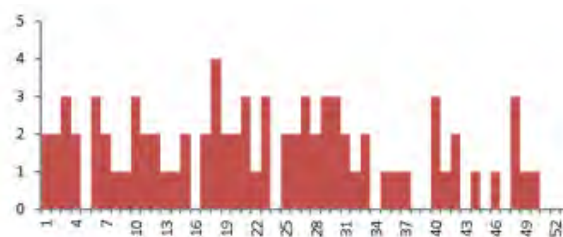


Figure 3: AFP cases by epidemiological week of onset

- During the past 2 weeks, 3 new suspected AFP cases were detected through active case finding and reported for further investigation. These new cases were identified in Baalbeck, Jbeil and Saida, aged 5-9y (2 cases) and 10-14y (1 case).
- Since the start of 2023, the national surveillance system was able to detect 80 suspected AFP cases. Among these cases, 2 cases were zero dose, i.e case who had not taken any dose of polio-containing vaccine.
- Suspected AFP cases were distributed in Mount Lebanon (11), the North (14), Bekaa (6), Nabatieh (3), South (20), Akkar (11), Baalbeck Hermel (8), and Beirut (7).
- The nationality of these reported AFP cases was 69% Lebanese, 29% Syrian, and 2% Palestinian.
- WHO continued 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.
- Although Lebanon has not detected and reported cVDPV2, it has been classified as a high-risk country for cVDPV2 introduction. Lebanon is now fully verified to deploy nOPV2 in case of cVDPV2 detection.
- WHO continues to provide technical support to update the national immunization calendar with the recent SAGE recommendations stressing on the importance of additional IPV campaigns in areas at high risk or with persistent of poliovirus circulation.

E. Other Communicable Diseases

1- Monkeypox

- While Mpox no longer constitutes a global public health emergency, it continues to pose a significant threat to the health of individuals and high-risk populations.
- WHO continued to support the MoPH in Lebanon in optimizing available resources to sustain the gains and leveraging the Mpox response for broader preventive sexual health programming.
- Globally, there are 92,783 confirmed Mpox cases, and 171 associated deaths, from 116 countries reporting cases. In the EMR, there are so far 95 confirmed cases and 1 death (As of 30 November 2023).
- There is no new global data available during this reporting period due to the delay in reporting.
- In this global outbreak, the group primarily affected has been Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), and WHO continues to support improved awareness and behaviors for risk reduction through National Authorities and local organizations. In the African setting, transmission is occurring sexually (West Africa) but also through animal to human transmission (Central Africa).
- Since the first case was detected on the 14th of June 2022, the MoPH in Lebanon has detected and reported 27 laboratory-confirmed cases of Mpox. During the current reporting period, no new Mpox cases were detected.
- Among these cases, 59% were between 25 and 34 years age group, 19% were between 35 and 44 years age group, 15% were equal or greater than 45 years. One 8-year-old female has also tested positive.
- Most cases were reported among males with only 2 cases among females. Overall, 60% of cases identified as Men who have Sex with Men (MSM).
- WHO, with the support of USAID, has engaged with 6 local thematic NGOs that are integrating HIV and Mpox activities among MSM in Lebanon in order to strengthen early detection and prevention of Mpox transmission at national level.
- 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.

2- Meningitis

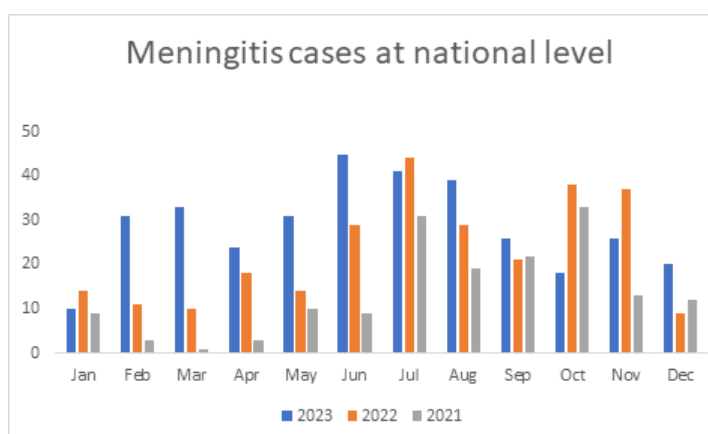


Figure 4: Number of suspected meningitis cases by month for past 3 years

- During this reporting period, 7 new suspected cases of meningitis were reported due to SP pneumococcus (3), viral (2) and unspecified (2). They were located in Mount Lebanon (2), Akkar (1), North (1), Bekaa (1), Baalbeck Hermel (1), and unspecified (1).
- Since the start of 2023, a total of 344 suspected meningitis cases and 29 meningitis-associated deaths were reported across the country.
- Beirut is the most affected governorate based on incidence per 100,000. These suspected meningitis cases were distributed in Mount Lebanon (32.6%), South (12.8%), North/Akkar (19.5%), Beqaa/Baalbeck Hermel (17.4%), Beirut (11%), Nabatieh (5.8%) and unspecified (0.9%).
- Upon further specimen testing (CSF and serum), 154 of these cases were classified as bacterial infection. Culture results showed 26 cases of *S. pneumoniae*, 7 *H. influenzae*, and 7 *N. meningitidis*.

“Day after day, the needs of Gaza’s war-ravaged people grow. Peril, ill-health, hunger, thirst, lack of shelter—these should not be the norm for millions of people. But sadly, they are.”

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Secretary General

WHO response

WHO and MOPH conduct capacity training on the People-Centered Primary Care approach



WHO and MOPH conduct capacity training on the People-Centered Primary Care approach

With the aim of integrating the People-Centered Primary Care approach into the practice of Primary Health Care facilities in Lebanon, WHO implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, the Primary Healthcare network, and with the support of the European Union in Lebanon, a 16-week competency-based learning program that includes training, coaching, self-paced work, and the establishment of responsive people participation groups.

In the closure event on 12 December 2023, participants from PHC centres had the chance to share their final projects and their opinions and views of the program. The event also featured input from service users.



WHO teams deliver supplies to hospitals in Northern and Southern Gaza

New mass displacement of Palestinians fleeing fighting, health facilities crammed with people seeking refuge, food

World Health Organization teams have undertaken high-risk missions to deliver supplies, with partners, to hospitals in Northern and Southern Gaza witnessing intense hostilities in their vicinity, high patient loads and overcrowding caused by people displaced by the conflict seeking refuge.

“Today I repeat my call on the international community to take urgent steps to alleviate the grave peril facing the population of Gaza and jeopardizing the ability of humanitarian workers to help people with terrible injuries, acute hunger, and at severe risk of disease,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

In WHO’s latest high-risk mission, teams visited on Tuesday 26 December two hospitals - Al-Shifa in the north and Al-Amal Palestine Red Crescent Society in the south – to deliver supplies and assess needs on the ground.

Both hospitals also serve as shelters for displaced people seeking relative safety. At Al-Shifa Hospital, a reported 50 000 people are sheltering, while in Al-Amal there are 14 000. [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.



WHO dashboard • WHO COVID-19 page • Q&A (English/Arabic) • WHO Lebanon website
WHO Lebanon Facebook | Twitter | Instagram

For more information

Dr Alissar Rady | Team Lead +961 3 661 131 | radya@who.int
Hala Habib | Communication Officer +961 3 870459 | hhabib@who.int