

HEALTH BRIEF

08 February 2024

COVID-19 Updates during the reporting period



New cases

640

Cumulative cases

1 250 506



New deaths

4

Cumulative deaths

10 992

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 the southern Lebanon. This has led to:
 - 739 persons were wounded and 161 killed within or outside of referral hospitals as of 2 February 2024, as reported by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). Since the last health brief (18 January 2024), the number of injured has increased by 13.7% and the number of fatalities by 8.8%.
 - 86,665 individuals becoming internally displaced as of 30 January 2024 (IOM). Of these, 1,212 (1.40%) are staying in 18 collective shelters and others have made their accommodation arrangements.
- WHO has been working with the MoPH and partners to scale up the preparedness and response capacities for ongoing emergencies, and some of the key achievements are as follows:
 - Continued to support the operationalization of the Public Health Emergency Operation Centers (PHEOC) to coordinate and support preparedness and response activities.
 - Maintained a strong health sector coordination mechanism at national and subnational levels to ensure that all health service gaps are addressed by health sector partners in a coordinated manner.
 - Facilitated the rapid hospital assessment of different hospitals as part of hospital preparedness and readiness. In total, 48 hospitals in different zones were assessed on-site by the PHEOC hospital task force, while 52 hospitals have self-completed the hospital readiness assessment.
 - Supported a 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, 63 hospitals have been covered by the mass casualty management training, and 2 hospitals have been covered by the management of psychiatric emergencies and basic psychosocial support training.

- 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 4% during the 28-day period of 11 December 2023 to 7 January 2024 as compared to the previous 28-day period, with over 1.1 million new cases. The number of new deaths decreased by 26% as compared to the previous 28-day period, with 8,700 new fatalities reported.
- As of 7 January 2024, over 774 million confirmed cases and over 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 640 new COVID-19 cases with 4 associated deaths were reported during this reporting period.
- Despite the slight increase of new cases during the winter season in Lebanon, the overall caseload is still under the threshold with lower severity, hospitalization, and deaths due to COVID. The positivity rate was 5.2%. The case fatality ratio stands at 0.88. In the past two weeks, the ICU COVID-19 occupancy rate at referral hospitals was 2%.

B. Acute Respiratory Infections *continued*

1- COVID-19 *continued*

- As of 31 January 2024, Lebanon has registered a total of 1,250,506 COVID-19 cases and 10,992 deaths since the start of the pandemic.
- 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 hospitalization and deaths.
- In continuation to previous capacity-building support and established partnership and network to monitor respiratory disease surveillance, WHO will continue liaising with the MoPH and its partners for monitoring of trends and variants of concern.

2- Integration of seasonal influenza and other respiratory disease surveillance

- With the support of WHO, MoPH continued to monitor the circulation of seasonal influenza viruses and other respiratory viruses. During this reporting period, 82 specimens from suspected SARI and ILI cases were tested at the National Influenza Centre (NIC) of which 14 specimens were positive for seasonal influenza virus, with influenza A(H1N1) being the predominant influenza subtype. No specimens were positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus. The majority of positive influenza cases were observed in the 0 to 5 years age group (50%), 16 to 50 years age group (28.6%), followed by the 6 to 15 years age group (14.3%). No positive RSV cases were detected.
- 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 (TFGH). 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 3,403 healthcare workers.
 - Elderly homes – targeting 1,920 healthcare workers and elderly people.
 - Public hospitals – targeting 1,123 healthcare workers.
 - Children with chronic conditions receive care at university medical centers.
 - Dialysis centers – targeting 445 dialysis patients.
 - Karageuzian and Dar El Hawraa PHCs – targeting elderly patients with chronic conditions.
- WHO continued to support the MoPH to strengthen seasonal influenza preparedness and response capacities at national and subnational levels. These supports are currently included:
 - Improvement of data processes, interoperability, and data flow through building capacities to use R software.

- Initiating procurement of essential test kits and other reagents for typing and subtyping.
- 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.
- Training of the NIC and ESU teams to ensure synchronization and flow of virologic information and data from the National Influenza Center (NIC) to regional and global reporting platforms (EMFLU, FluID, and FluNet).
- Continuous engagement and training with sentinel site staff and diagnosing physicians.
- Drafting of algorithms and protocols for pathogen testing for different respiratory diseases.
- Analysis of weekly data and dissemination of information through regular influenza situation reports.

C. Food and Waterborne Diseases

- In view of recent displacement and population movement in the south, WHO together with MoPH in Lebanon has been strengthening preparedness for AWD outbreaks by supporting a sentinel network of 12 active sites for timely detection and confirmation of potential cholera or other water-borne pathogens. Specimens from 12 AWD sentinel sites have generated 40 stool specimens over a period of 3 weeks that are being sent to the CIDR at AUB for further bacterial and virologic testing.

1- Cholera/Acute Watery Diarrhea

- There were no reports of suspected or confirmed cases of cholera during this reporting period.
- Active early warning surveillance is in place 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.
- There are no reported active AWD clusters among displaced populations in Lebanon.
- 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.
- 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.

2- Hepatitis A

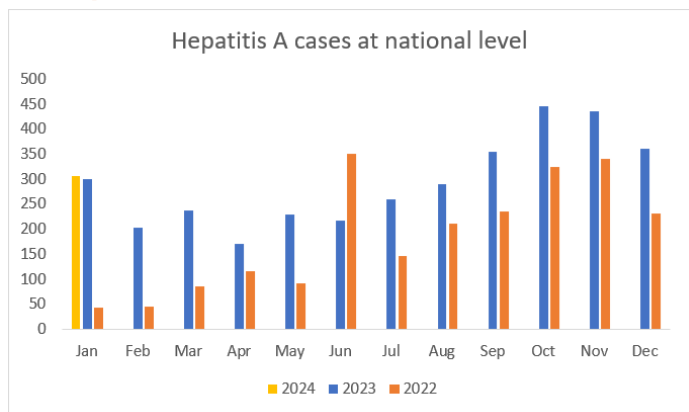


Figure 1: Number of suspected Hepatitis A cases by month for past 3 years

- During this reporting period, a total of 184 new suspected hepatitis A cases were reported across the country.
- There were no active clusters of hepatitis A cases recorded among displaced populations in the South.
- Since the start of 2024, a total of 305 suspected Hepatitis A cases have been reported from health facilities across the country, of which 34.1% have been reported among 20-39 years old, followed by 26.5% among 10-19 years old, and 23.9% among 5-9 years old.
- Suspected Hepatitis A cases were distributed in North (154), Beqaa (54), Mount Lebanon (53), South (31), Nabatieh (7), Beirut (4) and unknown (2)
- 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 campaign and promoting chlorination.

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.
- Through Gavi support, WHO is supporting the MoPH in improving routine immunization coverage, decreasing the number of zero-dose children, and decreasing the number of under-immunized children.

1- Measles

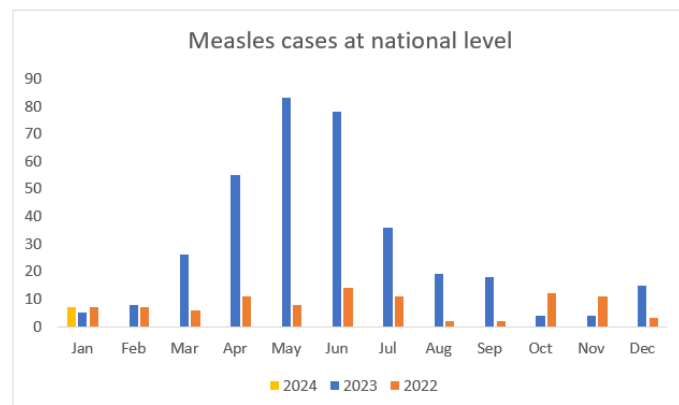


Figure 2: Number of suspected measles cases by month for past 3 years

- During this reporting period, a total of 4 new suspected measles cases were reported from North (2) Bekaa (1), and South (1). The new suspected cases affected various age groups, and all cases were unvaccinated.
- There were no active clusters of measles cases recorded among displaced populations in the South.
- The MoPH surveillance team conducts periodic series of field investigations for the reported suspected cases, and blood samples are collected and sent to the central laboratory for confirmation.
- Since the start of 2024, a total of 7 suspected measles cases have been reported at the national level. Among these cases, one case was lab-confirmed.
- Further analysis of the available data indicated that the South district has the highest measles attack rate, while 0 - 4 age group and 10-14 age group have the highest attack rates, followed by the 5-9 age group.
- Overall, 100% 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.
- Following last year's strengthening of decentralized capacities for early detection with the support of WHO, the MoPH is maintaining high vigilance at the start of 2024 for the detection of clusters of measles and any new outbreak wave.

2- Poliovirus

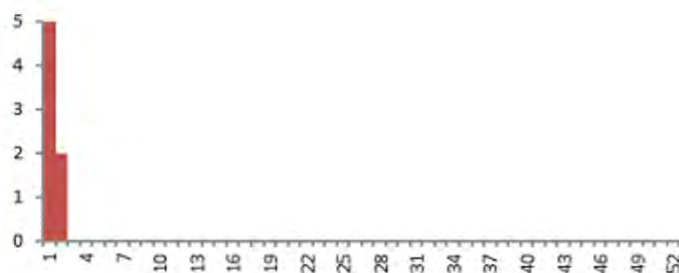


Figure 3: AFP cases by epidemiological week of onset

- During the past 2 weeks, 2 new suspected AFP cases were detected through active case finding and reported for further investigation. These new cases were identified in Mount Lebanon (2), aged 5-9y (1 case) and 10-14y (1 case).

EPI situation *continued*

- Since the start of 2024, the national surveillance system has been able to detect 7 suspected AFP cases. None of these cases were zero doses, i.e cases who had not taken any dose of polio-containing vaccine.
- The nationality of these reported AFP cases was 71% Lebanese and 29% Syrian.
- 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 the importance of additional IPV campaigns in areas at high risk or with persistent poliovirus circulation.
- WHO supported the MoPH in adopting an integrated disease surveillance structure focusing on the decentralization of essential early detection and notification functions to all administrative levels.

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 93,030 confirmed Mpox cases, and 176 associated deaths, from 117 countries reporting cases. In the EMR, there are so far 95 confirmed cases and 1 death (As of 31 December 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.
- No new Mpox case was detected or reported from Lebanon since January 2023.
- 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).
- Following the control of the mpox outbreak in Lebanon through the support provided for response capacities by USAID in 2023, the MoPH-adopted approach of integrating disease surveillance by mode of transmission will ensure sustainability of early detection capacities and linkages to confirmatory testing at the central RHUH laboratory in case of re-emergence of suspected cases.

2- Meningitis

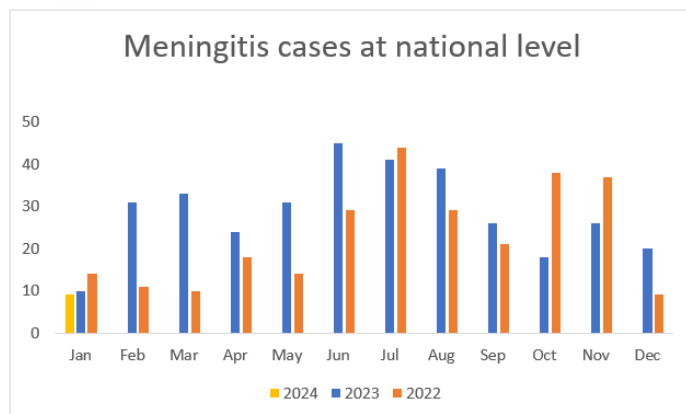


Figure 4: Number of suspected meningitis cases by month for past 3 years

- During this reporting period, 4 new suspected cases of meningitis were reported due to viral (1), bacterial (2), and unspecified (1). They were located in Bekaa (2), Beirut (1) and Mount Lebanon (1).
- Since the start of 2024, a total of 9 suspected meningitis cases with no associated death 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 (44.4%), Beirut (33.3%) and Bekaa/ Baalbeck Hermel (22.2%).
- Upon further specimen testing (CSF and serum), 3 of these cases were classified as bacterial infection.

“The reports of intensified shelling in Rafah, in southern Gaza, are deeply alarming. Desperately seeking safety, half of the Gaza population is sheltering there. The six hospitals in the area are beyond overwhelmed; further havoc would be unbearable. These people have nowhere else to go. Ceasefire. NOW.”

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Secretary General



WHO response

MOPH highlights achievements of the National Health Strategy: Vision 2023 - One Year Review



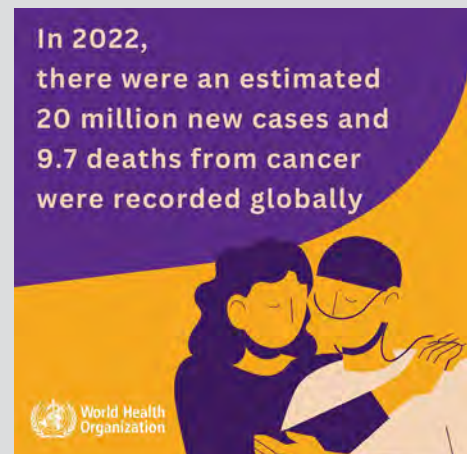
Over the past year, the Ministry of Public Health Lebanon worked tirelessly under the umbrella of the National Health Strategy: Vision 2023, launched in January 2023, to enhance the health and well-being of all populations living in Lebanon. This strategy aimed to rejuvenate, revitalize, and rebuild Lebanon's health sector, addressing the growing health needs head-on.

As we wrap up the first year, the Ministry of Public Health conducted a thorough review of the progress made across the strategy's various components. The goal is to highlight achievements, reaffirm commitments, and set the stage for the short- and long-term goals outlined in the Strategy. The insights from this review were shared today with health partners, sparking discussions on lessons learned, best practices, and the next steps to elevate the adoption of the remaining strategy components. Together, we're paving the way for a healthier Lebanon!

WHO and MOPH conduct capacity training on the Mass Casualty Management



In response to and as part of the emergency preparedness for the ongoing clashes along the Lebanese southern border, the Public Health Emergency Operation Center (PHEOC) at the Ministry of Public Health with support from WHO Lebanon country office, has carried out the latest set of trainings on Mass Casualty Management; 11 new hospitals were included in this training, raising the total of hospital trained to 40 and 195 trainees from frontline hospitals in the South. This is part of the Trauma Response Plan fully supported by WHO which represents a structured approach to managing trauma in a conflict context, emphasizing coordination, resource management, and continuous improvement. It covers the training of trainers for healthcare workers on three modules that are the clinical approach to trauma care, mass casualty management and Management of psychiatric emergencies, and basic psychosocial support skills. It is expected that by the end of March 2024, 121 hospitals will be reached as part of WHO support to PHEOC to strengthen hospital preparedness and readiness to respond to health emergencies.



WHO response

WHO and MOPH launch the Cancer Awareness Campaign



On February 4th, which was the World Cancer Day and marks the launch of the Cancer Awareness Campaign by the Ministry of Public Health and WHO, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education as well as partners. The campaign aims at creating awareness on the preventive measures that can decrease morbidity and mortality related to cancer.

WHO representative in Lebanon Dr Abdinasir Abubakar stated that, "Prevention would necessitate concerted multidisciplinary actions, especially in terms of modifiable personal behaviors and practice". He advocated the importance of creating awareness among younger people, but also the general public on cancer prevention. "We now know for a fact that the earlier a behavior is acquired, the more difficult it is to change it, and this is why addressing youth and working with them to acquire safer health lifestyle and behaviors is paramount in order to have healthier generations in general and reduce cancer risks in particular".

MOPH, WHO and UNICEF review and update national malnutrition prevention and management guidelines



In partnership with the Ministry of Public Health, WHO and UNICEF jointly supported the review and update of the national malnutrition prevention and management guidelines in Lebanon, through a consultative approach with key stakeholders. The aim is to strengthen malnutrition prevention and management through standardized national guidelines and enhance emergency preparedness to tackle malnutrition in Lebanon.

During the stakeholder nutrition consultation meeting, Dr Abdinasir Abubakar, Acting WHO Representative in Lebanon, highlighted WHO's commitment to "ensure that the malnutrition guidelines can contribute to the improvement of quality of nutrition services and meet the evolving needs of our population." He also added that "the role of each of healthcare providers, policymakers, and communities alike will be crucial to effectively benefit from these guidelines, as their integration into healthcare practices is equally vital."



Publication of a new report by the WHO

"The impact of economic sanctions on health and health systems in low- and middle-income countries",
Co-authored by Dr. Matteo Pinna Pintor and Prof. Marc Suhrcke and Dr. Christop Hamelmann.

More info [here](#)



WHO, KSrelief sign new agreement to support over one million people in Gaza

A US\$ 10 million agreement signed today by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) will provide more than one million people in Gaza with access to emergency life-saving health services. “The collaboration between WHO and KSrelief signifies a strategic, coordinated response to addressing urgent health needs in Gaza,” said Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “KSrelief’s generous commitment will enable WHO to continue bolstering the health system, ensuring that people displaced by ongoing violence have access to lifesaving health care.”

The project, which will be implemented over a 12-month period, will support 30 primary health care centers and 10 hospitals and ambulances across Gaza with essential medicines, medical supplies and disposables, and fuel. Approximately one million internally displaced people and those living within the catchment area of the targeted health facilities stand to benefit from this project. [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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