Public health priorities in emergencies

**Public health area**

**Main issues of concern**

**Communicable diseases**

People living in conflict areas and facing disruptions in safe water and sanitation services are at risk of waterborne diseases such as typhoid and cholera. People living in camp settings and areas hosting large numbers of displaced persons are especially at risk.

Vaccine shortages, low vaccination rates and disruption to the cold chain can also lead to increased cases of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as polio. Children who have been displaced or have been previously un-vaccinated or under-vaccinated are especially at risk.

**Gender**

Women and adolescent girls, especially those in fragile or hostile settings, face gender-based marginalization, including violence. These can increase during emergencies, resulting in early pregnancies that further threaten girls’ lives.

**Migrant health**

Displaced populations fleeing conflict usually require emergency and trauma health care, while others with chronic conditions coupled with population movement and overcrowded living conditions among refugees increase the risk of disease outbreaks.

**Noncommunicable diseases**

Patients already suffering from chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, kidney disorders, diabetes and cancers prior to an emergency may have severe exacerbations due to the inability to access medications or facilities for treatment.

**Persons with disabilities**

Persons living with disabilities are less likely to receive the aid they need during a humanitarian crisis, and are sometimes even turned away from shelters and refugees camps due to a perception that they need “complex medical” services.

**Maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health**

In crisis settings women and girls often lack access to basic health services, such as family planning, prenatal and postnatal care, and vaccine-preventable diseases, and adolescents need access to education and health care services, including contraception.

**Mental health**

Programmes for the proper rehabilitation of patients suffering from mental health disorders should be initiated as early as possible to help manage the stress and anxiety caused by displacement due to the stress of rebuilding and resettling in an area that is known to be disaster or war prone.

**Nutrition**

Acute disasters, whether major with long-term impact or temporary, may highlight or worsen a pre-existing malnutrition problem. Increased numbers of injured patients can face challenges finding trauma care and surgical services as well as access to nutritious foods.

**Water Sanitation and Health**

Acute disasters, whether major with long-term impact or temporary, may highlight or worsen a pre-existing malnutrition problem. Increased numbers of injured patients can face challenges finding trauma care and surgical services as well as access to nutritious foods.
Disrupted water and sanitation systems limit the supply of safe water for populations and health facilities.