



Dr Tasnim Atatrah of WHO Gaziantep checks boxes holding supplies to treat noncommunicable diseases like asthma, diabetes, and hypertension. WHO Gaziantep ships the supplies from Turkey to clinics in northwest Syria. Photo: WHO/Sheahen

WHO has developed a new health kit to support treatment for chronic disease patients in emergency settings. Three years after the kit's conceptualization, the first shipment of 6 kits, enough for 60 000 medical treatments, has been delivered cross-border from Turkey to northern Syria.

23 November 2017, Cairo, Egypt – In countries facing ongoing violence, the most direct victims are the people caught in the crossfire who sustain life-threatening trauma injuries. But in the longer term, conflict affects another group of people: those who are unable to access medicines and regular treatment for noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer, kidney diseases and other chronic conditions.

11-year-old Omar from Aleppo, Syrian Arab Republic, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of 9. Every month, he and his mother head to the nearest primary health care centre to collect his insulin supply. However, access to insulin is not easy as Omar lives in Jabal Samaan district, a conflict-ridden area where market prices are high and cold storage for medicines is not always available. As Omar grows and needs higher doses of insulin to control his diabetes, shortages will affect his ability to receive the required treatment every month.

Today in Syria, noncommunicable diseases such as cardiac diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases and diabetes are responsible for almost 46% of all deaths in the country, exceeding the number of deaths caused as a direct result of war-related trauma injuries.

“Because the impact of emergencies is not as immediately or clearly visible on patients with noncommunicable diseases, they tend to be ignored, and the long-term consequences can be deadly,” said Dr Slim Slama, WHO technical officer for the management of noncommunicable diseases.

As a result, people suffering from noncommunicable diseases are now one of the biggest at-risk groups during emergencies, with many dying of complications that are easily controlled in normal circumstances, but life-threatening without treatment.

Taking into account the shortages in medicines and supplies that may be faced by health facilities in emergency settings, WHO’s emergency health kit for noncommunicable diseases includes medical equipment and 22 essential medicines for chronic diseases such as hypertension, cardiac diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and selected mental health and neurological conditions. The kit also includes noncommunicable management protocols for health care workers, based on WHO standards.

In October 2017, the first shipment of 6 kits, providing 60 000 treatments, was procured and delivered to WHO’s hub in Gazientep, Turkey, and transported cross-border to health partners in northern Syria through WHO’s supply line, funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and by European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Additional kits have also been transported to Amman and will be delivered to implementing partners supporting WHO’s response activities in southern Syria.

Emergency health kits for noncommunicable diseases will also be shipped to Iraq by the end of 2017 to support WHO’s ongoing response, and to Libya and Yemen in 2018.

“WHO’s emergency kit for noncommunicable diseases will play a key role in supporting our work in countries facing emergencies. This includes making sure that health staff are trained on

early detection and referral of noncommunicable diseases, and that hospitals are provided with essential medicines, diagnostic equipment and other resources needed to keep them functioning,” said Dr Slama.

“While traditional priorities in emergency settings remain, such as trauma care, the impact of noncommunicable diseases on the health of people affected by emergencies needs to be more widely recognized and given much more attention, both by the humanitarian community, and the international community as a whole,” added Dr Slama.

Link to video

[WHO sending NCDs medicines and materials kits to humanitarian crises](#)

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