



Thousands of residents and newly displaced persons in Al Qayyarah and nearby towns have been exposed to serious health risks as a result of the toxic cloud. WHO/Oday Ibrahim 31 October 2016 – 15-year-old Zainab was suffering from severe suffocation when her family brought her in to the main primary health care clinic in Al-Qayyarah town, south-east of Mosul. Asthmatic since birth, Zainab was having trouble breathing as a result of the sulfur fumes from the burning Mishraq sulfur plant. As the wind blew the fumes in the direction of her home, Zainab’s breathing became more and more constricted, and her aerosol inhaler offered no relief. By the time her family brought her to the clinic, Zainab was on the verge of losing consciousness.

Doctors at the clinic provided Zainab with IV fluids and hydrocortisone until the inflammation in her airways improved and she was able to breathe normally. Most of the medicines used to treat patients at the clinic were provided by WHO through its implementing partner, Women and Health Alliance International (WAHA), a French nongovernmental organization. These include IV fluids, bronchodilators, hydrocortisone, and aerosol inhalers.

“The majority of cases suffer from mild to moderate to severe suffocation, and upper and lower respiratory tract infections,” said Dr Zoheir Idris, a doctor currently based at Al Qayyarah’s main primary health care centre. “A few also experience a burning or itching sensation on their skin, especially those who have pre-existing conditions such as eczema. We provide all patients with first aid at the clinic, and critical patients are referred to hospitals in Tikrit and Erbil, although with some access challenges due to the security situation.”

To date, more than 1000 people in Al-Qayyarah town and neighbouring areas have received medical assistance as a result of smoke from the sulfur plant. Medical assistance is provided

through mobile medical clinics and primary health care clinics, supported by national health authorities, and WHO-implementing partners. To scale-up health services in Al-Qayyarah and Makhmour, WHO has also provided 5 mobile clinics and one ambulance.

As military operations around Mosul continue, more than 16 000 newly displaced people have fled to safer areas, the majority of them heading south to Al Qayyarah and nearby towns, where they are now exposed to serious health risks as a result of the toxic cloud. Populations in the area are also exposed to fumes from 19 burning oil wells, some of which have been on fire for almost 4 months. To help internally displaced persons and host communities learn more about how to protect themselves, WHO has produced and distributed guidance in English and Arabic informing people of the effects of the fumes, what to do in case of exposure, and when to seek medical assistance.

Related link

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