

18 June 2014 – The Ministry of Health of the Kurdistan region of Iraq is reporting critical shortages in medicines and is requesting support from the World Health Organization (WHO) in the provision of urgently needed supplies.

Over the past two years, the health system in the Kurdistan region has been severely strained. More than 250 000 Syrian refugees are currently hosted in the region, and the recent violence in the Ninewa, Salaheddin and Diyala provinces has led to the arrival of an additional 300 000 internally-displaced persons. While the health system and health indicators are better in the Kurdistan region than the rest of the country, catering for additional 550 000 people is overburdening the health system and resulting in severe shortages in medicines and medical supplies.

Regular supplies of medicines and vaccines usually received from the central Government of Iraq in Baghdad have been halted since the violence began due to insecurity and blocked roads. Consequently, without international support, the Ministry of Health of the Kurdistan region predicts a humanitarian disaster.

Since the crisis began, WHO has provided the directorates of health in Dohuk and Erbil with medical supplies for mobile clinics, as well as interagency emergency health kits for 20 000 people, trauma kits for the treatment of 200 people and diarrhoeal disease kits for the treatment of 200 people.

WHO is working with the Ministry of Health to identify more sustainable ways of ensuring the availability of medicines and vaccines, given expectations that the crisis will continue. With the flow of medicines no longer possible from Baghdad, a warehouse in Solimaneya is being renovated with support from WHO to serve as a storage hub for medicines and vaccines for the entire region.

WHO is exploring the possibility of airlifting medicines and medical supplies from Iraq's main supply warehouse in Baghdad to Erbil, where they can then be distributed to health authorities in the region. WHO is also working with the Ministry of Health to identify gaps in medicines and supplies which can then be procured from WHO's main supply hub in Dubai.

“It is likely that violence will be prolonged and the numbers of people injured and displaced will increase. The rising summer temperatures will also increase the risk of communicable disease outbreaks. We need to make sure that the health system is strengthened and is able to respond to the health needs of the affected population, including patients who need life-saving medicines for chronic diseases, such as cancer and diabetes,” said WHO’s Representative in Iraq Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain.

For more information, contact:

Iliana Mourad, Health Cluster Coordinator: 9647809270773 or [mouradil@who.int](mailto:mouradil@who.int) or

Inas Hamam, WHO Communications Officer: +9647809270776 or [hamami@who.int](mailto:hamami@who.int)

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