20 September 2015, Baghdad – Under the provision of the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005), the Ministry of Health of Iraq, in consultation with WHO, declared a cholera outbreak in governorates of Najaf, Diwaniya, and parts of west Baghdad on 15 September 2015, and announced a stepping up of measures to stop transmission and prevent further spread of the disease.

The declaration came after a sudden increase in the number of acute watery diarrhoea diseases cases. Laboratory tests conducted in the central public health laboratory confirmed the presence of *Vibrio cholerae* subtype 01 Inaba in 38 out of a total of 106 stool samples tested. A cholera task force comprising officials from the Ministry of Health, WHO, and other United Nations partners has been set up to lead the response and coordinate with local health authorities in affected areas to control the disease which can, if not timely controlled, spread rapidly and widely.

“The Ministry of Health has been closely monitoring the situation and the implementation of the country cholera contingency plan has immediately been stepped up. We already started positioning and distributing medicines and other supplies for case management to locations where they are most needed,” said Dr Adela Hamoud, Minister of Health, who added, “We expect the number of cases to increase within the coming days but we are working with WHO and other health partners to manage this situation and contain the spread of the bacteria to other high-risk governorates in the country”.

Field investigation teams and health care providers have been deployed to affected areas to strengthen surveillance, investigation, case findings and standardize case management. Similarly, water authorities at the national and subnational levels have started to take action aimed at improving the quality and safety of water supply in affected areas, through chlorination, periodic monitoring of the quality of water and hygiene promotion.

Cholera is an acute diarrhoeal disease that causes massive loss of body fluids and can be deadly within hours if not adequately treated. WHO is taking all the necessary control measures to support the Ministry and other health partners to respond to the situation and ensure that the public health risk posed by this outbreak is urgently mitigated,” said Mr Altaf Musani, WHO Representative for Iraq.
While the outbreak is localized to a limited number of governorates, there is an urgent need to increase health promotion and education activities, not only within communities across the country but also in settlements with vulnerable populations, such as internally displaced persons whose numbers have now reached a staggering 3.2 million.

At present, there is no significant risk of international spread. However the situation is being robustly monitored to identify any sign or risks of spread of the disease to other places as a result of displacement and movement of pilgrims across borders.

Related link

Cholera

Media contact

Ms Ajyal Sultany
Communications Officer
e-mail: sultanya@who.int
mobile: +9647510101469

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