WHO EMRO  |  Fighting the world’s largest cholera outbreak: oral cholera vaccination campaign begins in Yemen

Aden, 10 May 2018 – The first-ever oral cholera vaccination campaign in Yemen was launched on 6 May and concludes on 15 May, just before the start of Ramadan. The campaign aims to prevent the resurgence of the world's largest cholera outbreak. The volatile mix of conflict, a deteriorating economic situation, and little or no access to clean drinking-water and sanitation have resulted in more than one million suspected cholera cases since the outbreak began in April 2017.

A race against time

This campaign is part of a broader cholera integrated response plan, implemented by national health authorities, WHO and UNICEF. Outbreak response activities include surveillance and case detection, community engagement and awareness, enhancing laboratory testing capacity, improving water and sanitation, and training and deploying rapid response teams to affected areas.

This epidemic has affected the entire country, and the implementation of this oral cholera vaccination campaign, as part of the entire response to cholera, marks a milestone in the combined efforts of WHO and UNICEF, in partnership with the World Bank and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, through the generous support of our donors.

“The ongoing conflict, lack of access to safe drinking-water, weak sewage systems due to lack of fuel for pumps and the collapsing health system is the perfect mix for a new explosion of cholera during Yemen’s rainy season, which is already in its beginning stages,” said Dr Nevio Zagaria, WHO Representative in Yemen.

“Hot” districts prioritized to prevent spread
On 24 April, UNICEF delivered the first batch of 455,000 doses of oral cholera vaccine from the Gavi-funded global stockpile, targeting people over the age of 1 year, including pregnant women. The Global Task Force for Cholera Control approved the request of more than 4.6 million doses of the vaccine from the global stockpile to target cholera hotspots across the country.

“This vaccination campaign comes at such a critical time. Children in Yemen were the worst hit by last year’s outbreak and remain the most vulnerable due to widespread malnutrition and deteriorating sanitation and hygiene,” said Meritxell Relaño, UNICEF Representative in Yemen.

Recent reports revealed that in the first 3 days of the campaign, more than 124,000 doses of oral cholera vaccine were administered. This represents 35% of the estimated target population in the 4 districts where the campaign began. A fifth district, will be included in the coming days, bringing the total target population to 470,905 individuals. The campaign currently involves 11 fixed teams and 328 mobile teams.

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