



11 April 2022 – In response to Yemen’s historic cholera outbreak and the heightened risk of other infectious diseases, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) have joined forces to improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) at health facilities throughout the country’s southern region.

The programme has targeted 45 health facilities in 19 governorates and 33 districts in southern Yemen at high risk for cholera, which is spread through water and food contaminated with faeces. The WHO programme is also improving safe disposal of medical waste, including hazardous used syringes, and strengthening water quality monitoring and surveillance in the 33 high-risk areas.

“We are protecting vulnerable communities by improving WASH services in health care facilities, and through routine water quality surveillance and disinfection,” said Dr Adham Abdel Moneim-Rashad, WHO Representative to Yemen. “It is a simple but powerful programme to combat a number of preventable diseases – but particularly cholera.”

Amid a 7-year war, Yemen is experiencing waves of cholera outbreaks due to the collapsed health system, absence of basic services, including water systems and networks, poor sewage disposal systems, and high displacement of individuals fleeing escalating violence.

The ongoing cholera epidemic, which began in April 2017, is considered the worst in the world since records began. The number of reported suspected cases already exceeds 1.9 million, and cholera has spread to some 96% of Yemen’s governorates since the beginning of the outbreak.

Widespread malnutrition is increasing susceptibility to outbreaks of cholera and other communicable diseases. Vector-borne diseases are surging, including dengue fever and malaria, and severe acute respiratory infections such as COVID-19. Because of a decline in vaccination amid the war, there have been new outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, including polio, which can cause paralysis in children and had been eliminated in Yemen.

The ongoing KSrelief-funded WHO programme targets diseases that are spread due to lack of clean water and sanitation. WHO is rehabilitating and improving infrastructure instrumental to water safety and quality at the 45 targeted health care facilities. The upgrades have included fixing sinks, toilets, and plumbing, and installing water tanks.

The programme includes installation of incinerators at 25 facilities to allow for safe disposal of medical waste. Awareness training about proper medical waste management has been conducted at all of the facilities. Personal protective equipment, disinfection and hygiene improvement supplies were distributed to 280 health care facilities to prevent hospital acquired infections among staff, patients and visitors.

Water quality monitoring and surveillance has been initiated or improved in the 33 cholera high-risk districts. Mobile water testing kits, chemicals and reagents are being provided to water supply providers in 6 governorates in the high-risk districts. Permanent water quality testing laboratories in Aden, Mukalla and Taiz are being established to enhance the capacities of regular water quality monitoring by water supply providers.

The programme has also included delivering more than 24.5 million gallons of fresh water by truck to 80 health care facilities.

“Cholera has caused immense suffering in Yemen,” Dr Moneim-Rashad said. “We are committed to reducing its spread, and that requires greatly expanding access to clean, safe water.”

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