



SIERRA LEONE TO BEGIN CHOLERA VACCINATION DRIVE IN DISASTER-AFFECTED AREAS

5 SEPTEMBER 2017 | FREETOWN - Half a million people in Sierra Leone will be able to access the life-saving cholera vaccine within weeks, the country's Ministry of Health and Sanitation announced on Tuesday.

The vaccines will be received from the Gavi-funded global stockpile and will target areas particularly affected by August's floods and deadly landslide, which resulted in over 500 confirmed deaths. Hundreds more people were reported missing in the wake of the disaster, according to the Office of National Security, while thousands were displaced from their homes.

"Cholera is a devastating disease which spreads quickly and kills fast, and risks can increase after severe flooding," said Dr. Brima Kargbo, Chief Medical Officer at the Ministry of Health and Sanitation. "The oral cholera vaccine is an important tool to better protect the country and affected communities against the disease, which will ultimately save lives."

Two rounds of vaccination are planned to run from September and will be delivered in 25 affected communities by the Government of Sierra Leone with support from Gavi Alliance, the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the UK Government and other health partners.

"The devastating floods and landslides which ravaged Sierra Leone throughout August have left the country dangerously vulnerable to water-borne disease outbreaks," said Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi Alliance. "Access to safe water and sanitation is limited, and the public health system, still recovering after the 2014 Ebola outbreak, is stretched. These lifesaving vaccines, alongside urgent support to improve safe water and sanitation, have the potential to prevent a cholera outbreak before it has the chance to bring more misery to a country that has already suffered enough."

The decision to send cholera vaccines from the global stockpile was taken quickly on 31st August by the International Coordinating Group (ICG) for Vaccine Provision following the deployment of a WHO specialist to the country. The full quantity of the vaccine (1,036,300 doses for two rounds) is set to arrive in Freetown on 7th September through UNICEF's global Supply Division.

WHO recommends that vaccination against cholera be considered in emergencies and other high-risk scenarios where there are increased threats of outbreaks, when combined with standard prevention and control measures for the disease. These measures include readiness to provide adequate testing and treatment, steps to ensure access to safe water and sanitation, and community mobilization to engage the public in preventing infection.

Sierra Leone's last major cholera outbreak, in 2012, killed 392 people and infected more than 25,000 others.

Gavi, WHO, UNICEF and partners are working with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to help plan and implement the campaign, which will make the vaccine available free-of-cost to disaster-affected populations, while supporting ongoing cholera prevention and preparedness.

Available from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2017/sierra-leone-cholera-vaccination/en/>

CHOLERA COUNT REACHES 500 000 IN YEMEN

14 AUGUST 2017 | GENEVA | NThe total number of suspected cholera cases in Yemen this year hit the half a million mark on Sunday, and nearly 2000 people have died since the outbreak began to spread rapidly at the end of April.

The overall caseload nationwide has declined since early July, particularly in the worst affected areas. But suspected cases of the deadly waterborne disease continue to rage across the country, infecting an estimated 5000 people per day.

The spread of cholera has slowed significantly in some areas compared to peak levels but the disease is still spreading fast in more recently affected districts, which are recording large numbers of cases.

Yemen's cholera epidemic, currently the largest in the world, has spread rapidly due to deteriorating hygiene and sanitation conditions and disruptions to the water supply across the country. Millions of people are cut off from clean water, and waste collection has ceased in major cities.

A collapsing health system is struggling to cope, with more than half of all health facilities closed due to damage, destruction or lack of funds. Shortages in medicines and supplies are persistent and widespread and 30 000 critical health workers have not been paid salaries in nearly a year.

"Yemen's health workers are operating in impossible conditions. Thousands of people are sick, but there are not enough hospitals, not enough medicines, not enough clean water. These doctors and nurses are the backbone of the health response – without them we can do nothing in Yemen. They must be paid their wages so that they can continue to save lives," said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

WHO and partners are working around the clock to set up cholera treatment clinics, rehabilitate health facilities, deliver medical supplies, and support the national health response effort.

More than 99% of people sick with suspected cholera who can access health services are surviving. Furthermore, nearly 15 million people are unable to get basic healthcare.

"To save lives in Yemen today we must support the health system, especially the health workers. And we urge the Yemeni authorities – and all those in the region and elsewhere who can play a role – to find a political solution to this conflict that has already caused so much suffering. The people of Yemen cannot bear it much longer – they need peace to rebuild their lives and their country," said Dr. Tedros.

Available from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2017/cholera-yemen-mark/en/>