Health Action in Crises
Highlights – No 95: 13 - 19 February 2006

Each week, the World Health Organization Department for Health Action in Crises in Geneva produces information highlights on the health aspects of selected humanitarian crises. The WHO contributions in each situation are provided through a mix of different WHO programmes: the staff involved is drawn from WHO field and country offices, often with support from different departments in WHO regional offices and Headquarters. The remit of the WHO departments specifically concerned with Emergency and Humanitarian Action in Crises is to increase the effectiveness of the WHO contribution to crisis preparedness and response, transition and recovery. This note, which is not exhaustive, is designed for internal use and does not reflect any official position of the WHO Secretariat.

SOUTH ASIA

EARTHQUAKE

On 15 February, the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator for Pakistan updated the first IASC-UNDG South Asia Earthquake Taskforce on the 90-day Winter Plan and on preparations for the transition.

Assessments and events:
- The humanitarian community continues working to ensure the completion of the final phase of the Winter Race plan. Priorities remain safe drinking water and adequate sanitation in and outside camps, strengthening health surveillance and setting up return strategies.
- Acute respiratory infections continue to be the main reason for consultation, accounting for 29% (90,643 cases and 26 deaths) of all consultations since the beginning of the year. The number of acute watery diarrhoea cases reported has been steadily increasing over the past 5 weeks, totalling 19,955 cases and 2 deaths since 6 January.

Actions:
- In Mansehra, a case of acute flaccid paralysis was investigated and the seven-year-old patient is now in Islamabad for treatment.
- In Battagram, three more cases of measles were reported in Meira camp in unvaccinated children recently arrived from Karachi. All children in the camp were covered by the recent measles vaccination campaign. Two further cases are still under investigation. Five cases of measles were also reported from an IDP camp in Islamabad. A campaign will be launched to vaccinate all children under 15 years of age against measles.
- Three reported cases of meningitis, two in Bagh and one in Balakot, are under investigation. Close contacts of the patients have been given chemoprophylaxis.
- WHO activities are supported by Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Commission, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Monaco, Norway, the Slovak Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and many private contributions.

More information is available at: WHO EMRO South Asia Earthquake or HAC South Asia Earthquake Crisis Coverage

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Assessments and events:
- In North and South Kivu and Orientale Province, security remains unstable, with massive population displacement. Attacks by armed groups were reported in South Kivu, where 16 women were kidnapped and 39 assaulted.
- It is expected that with the increased population movements risk of diseases and overall health needs will grow considerably in the coming weeks.
- In Uvira, South Kivu, 306 cases of cholera were reported, including 7 deaths (Case Fatality Rate 2.2%).
- In Mbuji Mayi, the capital of the Kasai Oriental Province, an epidemic of measles has been ongoing since November 2005. On 5 February, a total of 819 cases with 19 deaths had been registered (CFR 2.3%).
- The 2006 Humanitarian Action Plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo was launched this week and aims to provide a framework for humanitarian and stabilisation activities and to build a protective environment for communities, accelerating recovery and reconciliation.

Actions:
- WHO participated in two inter-agency missions to North and South Kivu to assess the needs of the displaced populations.
- In 2005, WHO activities were supported by Belgium, the European Commission, Finland, Norway and the United Kingdom.
- More information is available at: WHO’s planned activities for the DRC in 2006
Assessments and events:
- Between 28 January to 14 February, the Federal MoH reported 1 433 cases of cholera, including 27 deaths (CFR 1.88%), in Yei near Juba, South Sudan.
- From 1 January to 3 February, the Federal MoH reported 141 cases of meningococcal meningitis, including 16 deaths (CFR 11.34%) in the states of Al Gazeera, Blue Nile, Gedaref, Kassala, Khartoum, North Darfur, Sennar, South Darfur and White Nile. The epidemic threshold has been crossed in three administrative units (Blue Nile, Kassala and Gedaref).
- In Darfur, acute respiratory infections (ARIs), malaria and bloody diarrhoea remain the leading causes of morbidity for all age groups. ARIs contributed to the highest proportional morbidity (24%) among children under five.
- The general security situation in West Darfur remains unstable and phase 4 is activated in some areas.
- The risk of outbreaks of communicable diseases (malaria, diarrhoea and measles, ARIs, etc.) is expected to rise as well as weapon-related injuries.

Actions:
- In South Sudan, WHO, South Sudan MoH and Federal MoH assessed the cholera-affected areas. Field investigations are ongoing and daily reporting of cases is continuing.
- The surveillance system for reporting acute watery diarrhoea was strengthened in all affected areas. Two cholera kits and hypochlorite to disinfect water sources were also provided.
- The WHO guidelines on the management of acute watery diarrhoea were distributed to health partners throughout the area.
- In the states affected by the meningitis outbreak, WHO is providing drugs for case management and emergency supplies for investigation and control.
- WHO is also providing technical support to the national health authorities on epidemiological and laboratory investigation, risk assessment, case management and outbreak control.
- In West Darfur, WHO delivered training to State MoH officials on coordination, health programme planning and assessment at state level.
- WHO and UNICEF supported the Sudanese Red Crescent Society for the re-opening of the health clinic in El Riyadh on 15 February.
- In North Darfur, a joint WHO, UNFPA and Malteser assessment mission was conducted to Wada’ah, Gusa Jamat and Kilimando.
- WHO delivered training for nurses to enhance hospital performance and supported the State MoH in training for community health workers on the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness.
- In Kassala State, a meningitis immunization campaign reached over 68,500 people. WHO and the MoH are coordinating meningitis response.
- In addition, assessments were carried out in 18 health facilities with special focus on access to primary health care.
- In 2005, WHO activities were supported by the European Commission, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. A 2006 contribution has been received from Switzerland. Allocation of funds of the 2006 Common Humanitarian Fund has begun.

IRAQ

Assessments and events:
- The MoH in Iraq confirmed the country’s first case of human infection with the H5N1 avian influenza virus.

Actions:
- WHO continues its support to the MoH to prevent further cases of human infection with the H5N1 virus. Social mobilization activities are ongoing to raise community awareness.
- Antivirals, laboratory kits and supplies were procured to enable the management of avian influenza-related ailments. The distribution of the goods will prioritize the governorates where cases have been confirmed or are under investigation.
- WHO, in collaboration with the MoH, completed a four-day training on the Management of Health-Care Waste from Health Care Facilities in Baghdad.
Health Action in Crises
WHO is working with partners to address the health aspects of crises in more than 40 countries. Check the Health Action in Crises Web site for more details: http://www.who.int/disasters/

More information is available at:
http://www.emro.who.int/iraq/

• Under the UNDG ITF Emergency Medical Oxygen Production and Supply Project, the distribution of medical oxygen cylinders is continuing.
• Support for WHO’s activities was received from the UNDG ITF and the United States.

UGANDA

Assessments and events:
• From 28 December 2005 to 3 February 2006, 301 suspected cases of meningococcal meningitis including 23 deaths have been reported from the districts of Nakapiripirit (258 cases, 19 deaths) and Moroto (43 cases, 4 deaths) in north-eastern Uganda.

Actions:
• WHO, UNICEF and the local health authorities are investigating the suspected meningitis outbreak. WHO facilitated the dispatch of an MoH team to assist with the investigation.
• WHO provided 150,000 doses of vaccines, approximately 200 doses of oily chloramphenicol and two diagnostic kits to support treatment and diagnosis.
• WHO is providing technical support for meningitis epidemic preparedness in Kitgum district.
• WHO Gulu distributes a monthly newsletter that can be seen at: http://www.who.int/hac/crises/uga/sitreps/en/index.html
• Support for WHO’s activities was received from the European Commission, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

INTER-AGENCY ISSUES
• IASC Clusters The IASC Protection Cluster met in Geneva on 13 February.
• DDR. On 13 February, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration focused on the 2006 Report of the UN Secretary General to the General Assembly on the subject.
• Gender-based Violence. On 15 February, the GBV Group of the IASC Taskforce on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance discussed the distribution of the GBV guidelines and the country selection for field-testing.
• Communicable Disease Control in Emergencies. On 15 February, WHO briefed the IASC Weekly meeting in Geneva on the WHO Manual on Communicable Disease Control in Emergencies.
• Montreux VI. The annual Humanitarian Donor Retreat will take place in Montreux on 16 and 17 February. The meeting will review CAP issues, the volume of humanitarian funding, Humanitarian Reform, the Cluster Approach and the Humanitarian Coordinator System.

HUMANITARIAN NEGOTIATIONS WITH ARMED GROUPS
The Manual on Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups and its complementary set of Field Guidelines will be officially launched on 16 February in New York and on 23 March in Geneva in the margins of this year’s retreat of the Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators. Hard copies of the Manual and Guidelines as well as the accompanying CD-ROM will be distributed at the launch events.

Please send any comments and corrections to crises@who.int

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