

## Current major events

### ‘Nodding Disease’ in southern Sudan

In January 2008, an advisor on school health and nutrition working for Save the Children (USA) observed several cases of children suffering from “nodding disease”, while on a visit to southern Sudan. The affected children were from the districts of Mvolo and Wulu in Western Equatoria and Lakes states respectively.

A quick assessment among the community for data of children infected with the disease revealed more than 100 cases in a population of 3-5,000 people. Save the Children USA requested WHO/HQ to assist in investigating this disease, identify risk factors and help prevent and/or find cure for this disease.

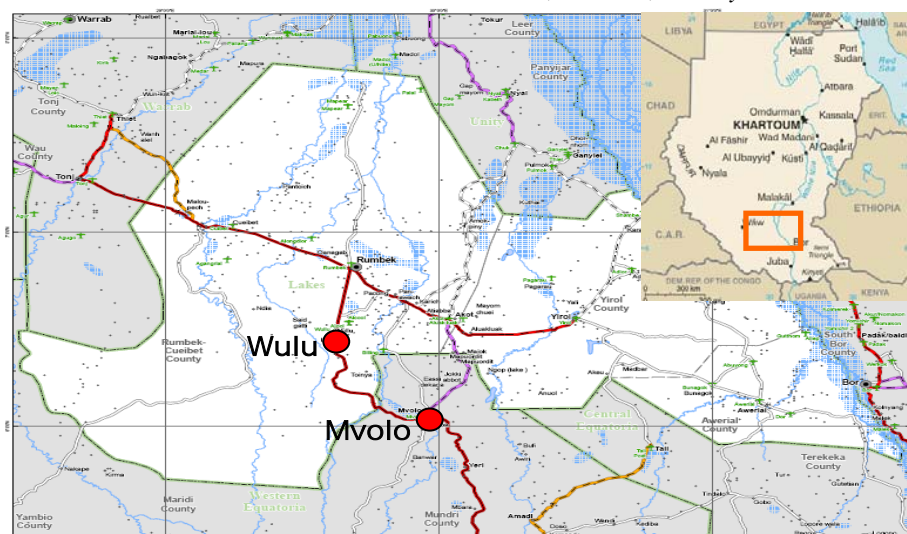
On 14 January WHO/HQ notified

### Editorial note

“Nodding disease” is unique progressive disorder, of unknown etiology, characterized by repeated nodding of the head; often triggered by eating. Some experts suspect that nodding disease could be connected to river blindness, because the two disease are found in high concentrations in this area. Lui hospitals in southern Sudan recorded a total of 207 suspected cases of nodding disease between 1998-2001.

The disease was initially reported in children from Moru tribe of Mundri County, southern Sudan and lately has been reported among other neighbouring communities. Children with disease die from burns and drowning during seizures, and from weight loss associated with the syndrome. However, the disease was not reported to affect children from Dinka and other tribes living in the same area.

Three WHO missions conducted clinical, epidemiological, toxicological and electro-encephalography studies during



WHO/EMRO. Verification through WHO offices in Sudan and the government health authorities did not yield any additional information about the disease. The two districts border Mundri County, where in 2001/2 WHO researchers investigated an outbreak of nodding disease but did not identify the etiology.

the assessments, and collected blood, skin biopsies, food and environmental samples for further laboratory analysis in WHO reference laboratories in 2001 and 2002.

Security has considerably improved in Southern Sudan; and access to the affected areas is quite good now. This should rejuvenate the interest of researchers and allow for a more thorough assessment and a longer time for research studies on the “nodding disease”.

### Facts:

- The disease was first noted in 1991 in southern Sudan
- The disease is characterized by repeated nodding of the head (often triggered by eating), generalized seizures, physical and mental retardation
- Moru tribe of southern Sudan call it “*Adravo Linyaro*” which means the disease of food because of its association with eating

## Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

### No new outbreaks in the EMR this week

**Last weeks’ data: Avian Influenza:** A new case of human avian influenza (AI) in Egypt (*case No. 47*); Laboratory evidence of second human case of AI in Pakistan (*microneutralization*); **Cholera:** Somalia

### Current public health events of international concern

[cumulative N° of cases/deaths, CFR %]

#### Avian influenza

Egypt	[47/20, 42.5%]
Indonesia	[129/105, 81.4%]
Viet Nam	[105/51, 47.1%]

#### Cholera

Somalia	[561/12, 2.1%]
Iraq	[4,697/ 24, 0.5%]
D.R. Congo	[4136/126, 3.1%]
Namibia	[75/1, 1.3%]

#### Suspected Haemorrhagic fever

Uganda	[27/8, 29.6%]
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#### Febrile illness (?Meningitis)

Uganda	[8/7, 87.5%]
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#### Yellow Fever

Paraguay	[24/8, 33.3%]
Argentina	[3/0, 0.0%]

(\*=Unofficial figures) CFR=Case-Fatality Rate