

Current major events

Cholera continued to threaten public health in EMR

Cholera continued to threaten public health and claim lives in the countries of Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) in 2008. During this year (upto the end of November 2008), a total of 7,206 cases of cholera/acute watery diarrhea including 51 deaths (CFR: 0.70%) were officially reported to WHO by 5 Member States in the EMR (*Please see the graph*).

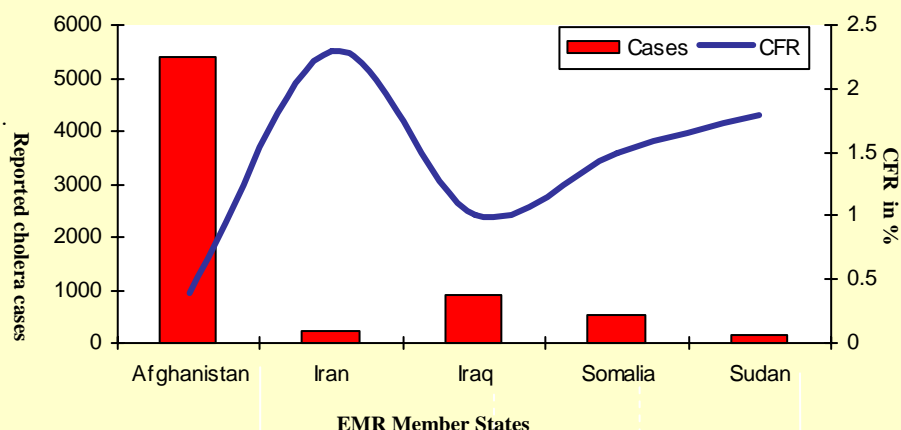
Compared to last year (2007), the number of cases officially notified to WHO this year dropped by about 88%. A total of 60,461 cholera cases were reported in 2007 compared to only 7,206 cases reported this year. The number of deaths from cholera also fell from 1,731, reported in 2007, to only 51 reported during the current year, a decrease by over 97%. The overall CFR also dropped this year compared to last year (*From 2.86 reported in 2007 to 0.70 reported this year*).

Editorial note

Cholera remains a continual threat to public health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Countries in crisis or in humanitarian emergencies are specially vulnerable to the growing threats of cholera. These countries were in conflict situation for protracted period and as their health systems recover from the crisis, they are facing recurrent outbreaks from cholera. The increasing number of vulnerable populations living in unsanitary conditions in these countries, with limited access to safe water and health services facilities remain particularly at risk. Some countries (Iran for example), on the other hand, are also reporting sporadic cases every year due to cases imported from its neighbouring countries which are reeling through disruptive outbreaks every year.

Although, almost all the countries of the EMR which reported cholera outbreaks last year (2007) reported a significant drop in number of cholera cases reported this year (2008), there are fears that the changing dynamic of the outbreaks as has been observed this year,

Reported Cholera Cases in Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2008



Cholera Cases Reported in EMR, 2008

Country	Cases	Deaths	CFR (%)
Afghanistan	5403*	24	0.4
Iran	216	5	2.3
Iraq	892	11	1.2
Somalia	532	8	1.5
Sudan	163	3	1.8
TOTAL	7,206	51	0.70

* Includes suspected cases as well.

combined with the emergence of new strains (hybrid strains have possibly been found in some of the countries of EMR this year) along with increased microbial resistance, cholera may re-emerge as the forefront of public health agenda in many of the endemic countries of EMR unless a concerned and coordinated approach is taken to improve surveillance and preparedness activities.

As soon as the International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR 2005) entered into force on 15 June 2007, official notification of cholera has not been mandatory. However, countries are strongly encouraged to officially report cholera to WHO using standard case definition for open and transparent information sharing. Such open reporting can avoid over reaction, earn credibility of the countries concerned as well as diminish stigma.

Improving the EMR's vulnerable populations' access to safe water and sanitation will remain a formidable challenge but is critical to reduce the risk of cholera in those countries which are facing recurrent outbreaks every year

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Acute Haemorrhagic Fever: in Sudan
Dengue: in Pakistan, Sudan. **Cholera:** in Iraq; Iran, Somalia and Afghanistan.

Current public health events of international concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Acute Haemorrhagic Fever syndrome

Sudan	[33 (14), 42.4%]
Mali	[41 (?), ? %]

AWD/Cholera

Somalia	[532 (8), 1.5%]
Iran	[216 (5), 2.3%]
Afghanistan	[5403* (24), 0.4%]
Iraq	[771 (8), 1 %]

Dengue fever

Sudan	[68(?), ?%]
Pakistan	[10 (8 ?) #]

Plague

Uganda	?
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Arenavirus (New Virus)

Zambia	[5 (4), 80%]
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Yellow fever

Cote d' Ivoire	[6 (0), 0%]
Guinea	[2 (0), 0%]
Burkina Faso	[2 (0), 0%]
Central African Republic	[1 (0), 0%]

(* = Suspected)

CFR = Case-Fatality Rate

? = No data

= Risk assessment ongoing. Of these suspected cases, 8 deaths were reported.