

Current major event

Disease surveillance system steps up in response to crisis in Iraq

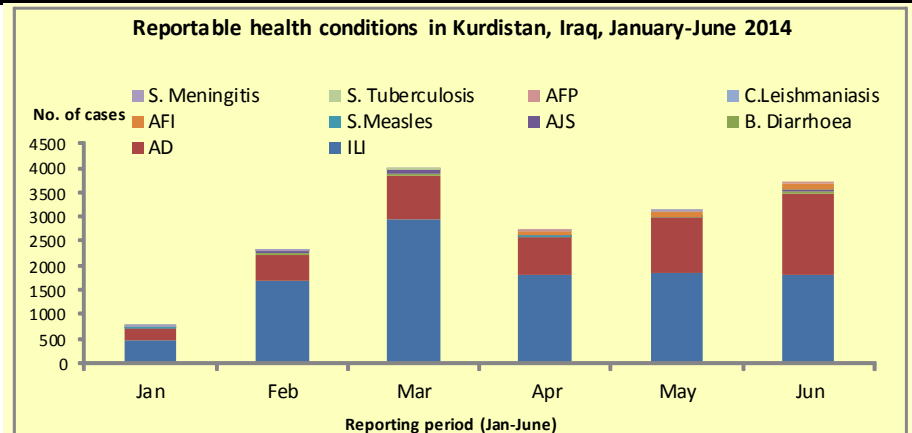
As the current crisis in Iraq unfolds, health situation in the affected areas continues to deteriorate enhancing the risk of epidemics manifold. The Early Warning and Alert Response System (EWARN) for detecting outbreaks which have been set up in Kurdistan region in September 2013 for the Syrian refugees is being scaled up in view of this current epidemic threats.

Editorial note

The current conflict and security situation in Iraq and Syria has led to rapid increase in number of refugees and displaced people (IDPs) in Kurdistan Region (KRG) of Iraq. The number of refugees and internally displaced people in the region has already reached over 1 million now. This large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) emanating from the ongoing conflicts in northern and western Iraq on the top of Syrian refugees living in the Kurdistan region since 2011, and currently estimated at 250,000, has severely strained the already overstretched health system in the region.

Many of the refugees and IDPs are living in camps and among host communities, some in dilapidated buildings that increases the risk of communicable disease outbreaks. Access to health care services of these displaced populations has been further compromised due to volatile security situation in the region.

In the face of such humanitarian crisis, health often becomes the first casualty. The routine vaccination programme throughout Iraq has been disrupted, and before the current crisis, there was an ongoing outbreak of measles in many governorates including Kirkuk, Diyala and Sulaymaniyah. On the top of it, owing to continuous population movement between KRG and other strife-torn governorates, there is a real risk that wild polio virus detected in Baghdad few months before this crisis unfolded could spread to Kurdistan region. The region



S. Meningitis: Suspected Meningitis, S. Tuberculosis: Suspected Tuberculosis, C. Leishmaniasis: Cutaneous Leishmaniasis, S. Measles: Suspected Measles, AFI: Acute Febrile Illness, ILI: Influenza Like Illness, B. Diarrhoea: Bloody diarrhea, AD: Acute Diarrhea, AJS: Acute Jaundice Syndrome, AFP: Acute Flaccid paralysis,

List of past outbreaks reported in KRG

- Cholera in 2007, 2008 and 2012
- Hepatitis A outbreak, 2013
- Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, 2013
- Measles outbreak, 2013, 2014

has also seen some of the worst outbreaks (*please see the table*) of infectious diseases in recent past.

In view of the current situation, the EWARN system needs to be rapidly scaled up to cover all the camps as well as the host communities where both the Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs are currently living. The system should provide health intelligence as shown in the graph above to ensure timely detection and response to any disease outbreaks, or unusual escalations in number or occurrence of communicable diseases.

In addition, owing to endemic pattern of some commonly prevalent diseases in the region, the risk and likelihood of spike in infections from diseases such as Cholera, Diarrhoeal Diseases, Measles, Enteric Fever, and Viral Hepatitis need to be managed through stepping up epidemic preparedness measures. Massive population movement, limited or lack of access to preventive and curative health-care services and disruption of routine public health programmes are usually common ingredients for occurrence of outbreaks. The current situation, therefore, calls for urgent response in terms of scaling up EWARN as well as intensifying epidemic preparedness measure for preventing any outbreak.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

MERS-CoV in Saudi Arabia, **Avian Influenza A (H5N1)** in Egypt, and **Dengue Fever** in Sudan

Current public health events of international concern

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

Avian Influenza A (H5N1): 2003-2014

Egypt [176 (64), 36.4%]

MERS-CoV: 2012-2014

Saudi Arabia [720 (294), 40.8%]

Jordan [11 (6), 54.5%]

Oman [2 (2), 100%]

UAE [66 (8), 12.1%]

Kuwait [3 (1), 33.3%]

Tunisia [3 (1), 33.3%]

Qatar [7 (4), 57.1%]

Yemen [1 (1), 100%]

Egypt [1 (0), 0%]

Lebanon [1 (0), 0%]

Iran [4 (1), 25%]

Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever: 2014

Guinea [408 (307), 75.2%]

Liberia [131 (84), 64.1%]

Sierra Leone [305 (127), 41.6%]

Wild poliovirus: 2012-2014

Pakistan [239 (0), 0%]

Dengue Fever: 2014

Sudan [1001 (7), 0.7%]

Cholera 2014

South Sudan [2684 (64), 2.4%]