

Current major event

Cholera outbreak in Iraq

Between 15 September to 19 November 2015, the Ministry of Health of Iraq reported to WHO a total of 4,864 laboratory-confirmed cases of cholera. However, when re-tested at the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) in Baghdad, a total of 2,847 stool samples were found positive for *Vibrio cholerae* 01 Inaba.

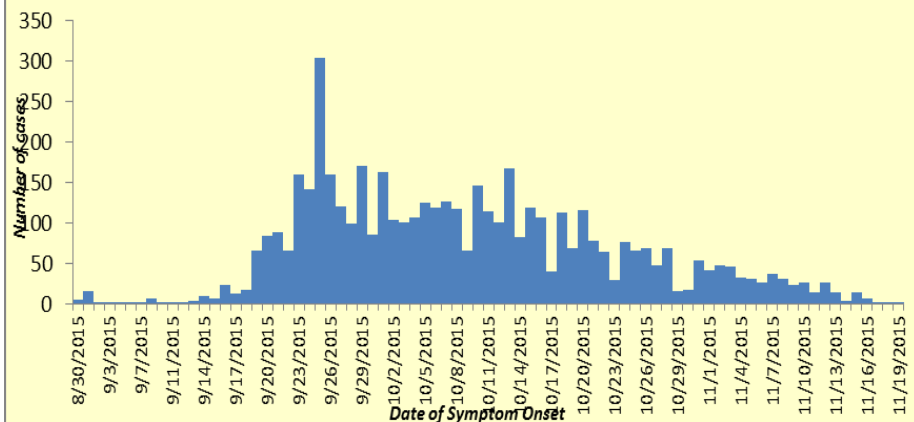
Editorial note

Cholera is endemic in Iraq. The country has faced repeated outbreak from cholera in the recent past (*Please see the table*). After a gap of nearly three years, the country reported its first laboratory-confirmed case on 15 September 2015 from Abu Ghraib in Baghdad. Since then and until 19 November 2015, a total of 2,847 laboratory-confirmed cases of cholera were notified officially by the Ministry of Health. Only two related deaths have been reported by the Ministry of Health officially during this period. Owing to its own internal policy decisions, the country has refrained from reporting the total number of suspected cases from any outbreak in the recent past.

Currently, the overall trend of the disease is on the decline (*please see the epidemic curve*) although cases continue to be reported in small numbers from the affected districts. So far, 16 out of the 19 governorates in the country have reported laboratory-confirmed cases. The central public health laboratory of Iraq identified that the causative strain of current outbreak is *Vibrio cholerae* 01 Inaba. The strain has been found to be sensitive to commonly used antibiotics including tetracycline, ciprofloxacin and erythromycin.

The current cholera outbreak in Iraq has increased the risk of spillover into the neighbouring countries specially in Syria owing to population displacement and frequent cross-border movement of conflict affected populations between these two countries. Reporting of some imported cases which were all travel-associated in some of the neighbouring countries of Iraq apprehended the risk

Figure 1: Epidemic Curve of laboratory-confirmed cholera cases by date of onset in Iraq; 30th August - 19 November, 2015 (n=4864)



Cholera outbreak reported from Iraq in the recent past

Year	Cases	Death
2002	718	0
2007	4696	24
2008	925	11
2009	6	0
2012	4693	4

of importation of cholera cases in neighbouring Syria. With a view to preventing any spread of cholera amongst the vulnerable Syrian refugees population living in displaced camps in Iraq, a preventive mass campaign with oral cholera vaccines (OCV) was conducted in 62 high risk camps. The vaccination coverage achieved after the end of the first round of the campaign was over 93%. It is expected that after the successful completion of the second round of the campaign and with the expectant “herd immunity” the risk and threat of spread of cholera in these refugee camps would be totally minimized, if not completely over.

In situation like that prevailing inside Iraq, operational response to cholera is a challenging task owing to insecurity as well as limited access. Although, not yet completely over, the threat has started to subside. The successful containing of cholera transmission in Iraq is a glaring example that outbreaks can be contained even in most challenging circumstances and lives saved if the response is rapid and appropriate measures to limit the transmission are rapidly put in place.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

MERS-CoV in Saudi Arabia; Cholera in Iraq

Current public health events of international concern

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

Avian Influenza : 2006-2015

Egypt (A/H5N1)	[346 (117), 33.8%]
Egypt (A/H9N2)	[3 (0)]

MERS-CoV: 2012-2015

Saudi Arabia	[1277 (549), 42.9%]
Jordan	[18 (8), 44%]
Oman	[6 (3), 50%]
UAE	[75 (10), 13.3%]
Kuwait	[3 (1), 33.3%]
Republic of Korea	[186 (36), 19.3%]
Qatar	[12 (4), 33.3%]
Iran	[6 (2), 33.3%]

Cholera

Iraq	[4864 (2)]
Tanzania	[9871 (150), 1.5%]

Ebola Virus Disease: 2014-2015

Guinea	[3804 (2536), 66.6%]
Liberia	[10666 (4806), 45%]
Sierra Leone	[14122 (3955), 28%]

Viral Haemorrhagic Fever (of unknown aetiology)

Sudan	[464 (120), 25.8%]
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Wild poliovirus: 2015

Pakistan	[43 (0)]
Afghanistan	[17(0)]

Dengue

Egypt	[253(0)]
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