



WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean **Health emergencies quarterly bulletin**

Third quarter 2023 – July to September 2023

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Foreword

As we reflect on the events of the third quarter of 2023 (July to September 2023), it is evident that the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is facing unprecedented challenges. We have experienced six new emergencies in the last quarter, including the escalation of a cholera outbreak in Sudan, on the back of the ongoing conflict in the country; floods in Libya; and major earthquakes in Morocco and Afghanistan.

Nineteen per cent of the Region's population – some 140 million people – are in need of humanitarian assistance. This figure represents 38% of the total number of people in need worldwide. Additionally, the disproportionate impact on the Region of climate-related disasters, such as the El Niño-fuelled seasonal Deyr rains in Somalia, has further exacerbated the challenges we face. The consequences of these crises on health, lives and livelihoods are horrific.

In light of these difficult times, it is imperative that we become more proactive and dynamic in our efforts to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, detect and respond to health emergencies arising from all hazards. The vulnerable populations in our Region are looking to us – WHO and the wider United Nations system – for support and assistance. We need to fortify our preparedness and redouble our operational readiness efforts to meet these escalating challenges head-on.

While it is crucial to rise to these challenges, we must also prioritize our own well-being and that of our families and our colleagues. In these trying times, I cannot stress enough the importance of cross-unit, cross-departmental and three-level collaboration. By working together, and pooling our expertise, resources and knowledge, we can adopt innovative solutions, share best practices and preserve the health systems across our Region – our ultimate shared goal.

The COVID-19 emergency serves as an excellent example of how our technical areas and the global, regional and country levels of the Organization came together in a joint response. It is crucial that we consistently practise similar collaboration in our response to the current emergencies in the Region.

As we highlight some of the Region's emergencies in the inaugural issue of this new quarterly bulletin, the WHO Health Emergencies Programme continues its efforts to build capacities and support every country and territory of the Region to promote a healthier and safer world.



Rick Brennan
Regional Emergency Director
WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

Health emergencies new events and map

NEW EVENTS IN THE REGION – JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2023*

Member State/territory	Event	WHO grade**
Afghanistan	Floods	Protracted level 3
Afghanistan	Malaria	Protracted level 3
Egypt	Dengue	None
Lebanon	Measles	None
Libya	Storm	Grade 2
Morocco	Earthquake	Grade 2
Pakistan	Dengue	None
United Arab Emirates	Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus	None

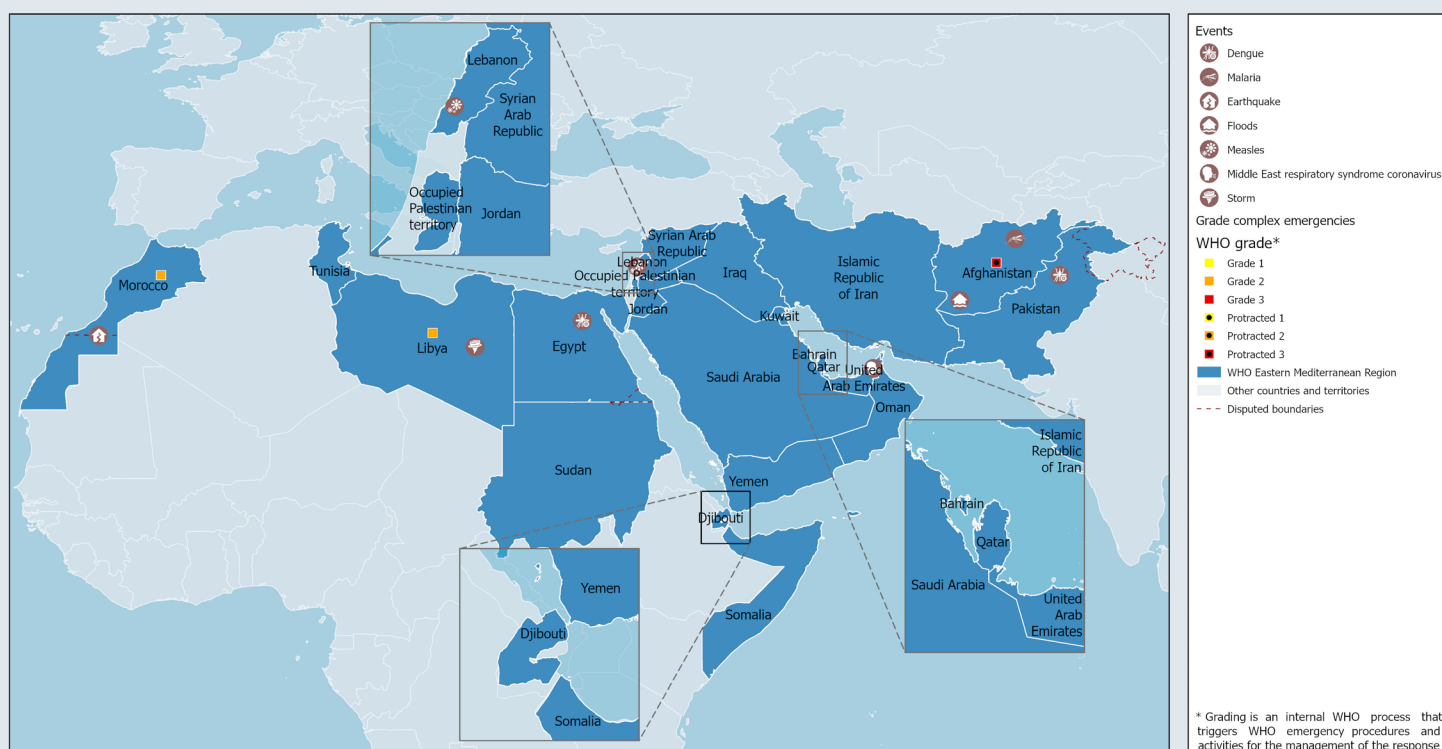
*This table only includes the new events that started between July and September 2023.

**Grading is an internal WHO process that triggers WHO emergency procedures and activities for the management of the response.

[More information on WHO grading](#)

HEALTH EMERGENCIES MAP

Geographical distribution of new events in the Eastern Mediterranean Region 1 July to 30 September 2023



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the World Health Organization concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted and dashed lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.

Iraq: Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever

SITUATION AS AT 20 AUGUST 2023



1819
cases



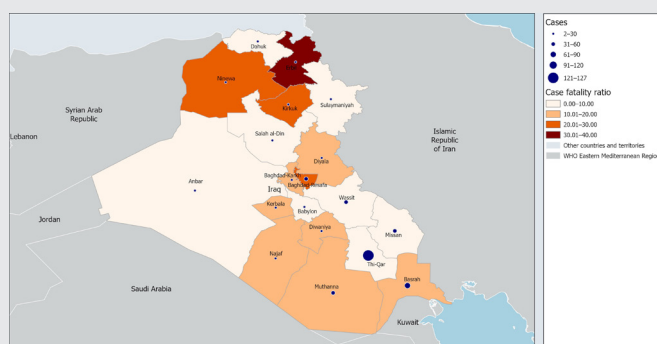
104
deaths

BACKGROUND

In 2023, Iraq experienced a significant increase in cases of Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF), a tick-borne viral disease. From January to August, there were 1819 suspected cases, with 509 cases confirmed through laboratory testing. The outbreak has resulted in 104 fatalities, which equates to a case fatality ratio (CFR) of 12% among confirmed cases.

The geographic distribution of confirmed CCHF in Iraq in 2023 shows varying patterns. Southern provinces, like Basra, reported 78 cases (CFR: 14%), while Baghdad-Resafa reported 51 cases (CFR: 21%). In contrast, Erbil, in the north, recorded only 13 cases, but with a relatively higher CFR of 38%, indicating the varying prevalence and severity of the disease across the country.

Fig 1. Geographic distribution of CCHF and case fatality ratio in Iraq, January to August 2023



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An increase in reported cases and deaths occurred during and immediately after Eid al-Adha, in week 27 of 2023 (96 confirmed cases) and week 28 (49 confirmed cases). This suggests a link between the holiday festivities, animal movements and the handling of raw meat in creating an environment conducive to disease transmission. It may be possible to attribute the decline in cases following Eid al-Adha in both 2022 and 2023 to a reduction in slaughtering activities and/or an increase in community awareness or other preventive efforts.

It is essential to consider the shifting timing of Eid al-Adha, as it follows the Hijri calendar, leading to varying holiday dates each year. This temporal variation can affect data collection, reporting and disease prevalence during comparable epidemiological weeks in different years.

There was another decrease in reported cases during week 29 of 2023, which can be attributed to several factors. The conclusion of the Eid al-Adha festivities led to a reduction in home slaughtering practices, lowering the risk of human exposure to potentially infected animals and their fluids. A twofold increase in cases during week 30, however, raises concerns about the outbreak's dynamic nature and the likelihood of further increases coinciding with the occasion of Al-Arba'een.

Iraq: Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

- In August 2023, a meeting took place in Karbala province involving the acting WHO Representative in Iraq and stakeholders from the human health, animal health and religious sectors. This meeting facilitated collaboration and the exchange of expertise among these sectors, which was essential for a comprehensive response.
- A meeting of the Higher Committee for Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever Control was headed by the Minister of Health on 12 July 2023. The WHO Country Office in Iraq, represented by the WHO Representative and the Country Office's technical team, emphasized the need for cross-agency collaboration and resource allocation. This was pivotal in ensuring that resources were allocated efficiently and that efforts were coordinated among various agencies. Lastly, WHO highlighted the renovation of old slaughterhouses as a key recommendation to enhance hygiene and reduce sources of infection. This proactive approach aimed to address the root causes of CCHF transmission and promote better practices in the handling and processing of animals.
- As of 20 August 2023, the public health response to the CCHF outbreak has demonstrated a multifaceted and collaborative approach to mitigate the disease impact. Several critical initiatives were undertaken to manage the outbreak effectively.
- To facilitate early and accurate diagnosis of CCHF cases, a large number of copies of the CCHF case definition were distributed to health facilities. This step was pivotal in ensuring that patients were correctly identified and categorized, allowing for appropriate treatment and isolation measures.
- Further, a case management algorithm disseminated to hospitals engaged in CCHF management was instrumental in standardizing care practices. This approach helped to maintain consistent treatment protocols and minimize variations in patient care.
- The WHO response has involved the procurement, testing and distribution of 15 000 ampoules of Ribavirin injection, provided by the WHO Country Office in Iraq. This antiviral medication is considered a possible therapeutic intervention for CCHF cases, offering the potential for improved patient outcomes.
- To protect those at high risk, 55 000 sets of personal protective equipment, which included heavy-duty aprons and gloves, were distributed to butchers. This measure was crucial in safeguarding the health of individuals involved in the handling of potentially infected animals, reducing the risk of transmission.



Participants in discussion at the collaborative meeting in Karbala.

Photo credit: WHO/WHO Iraq

Libya: Tropical Storm Daniel

SITUATION AS AT 19 SEPTEMBER 2023



8548
missing

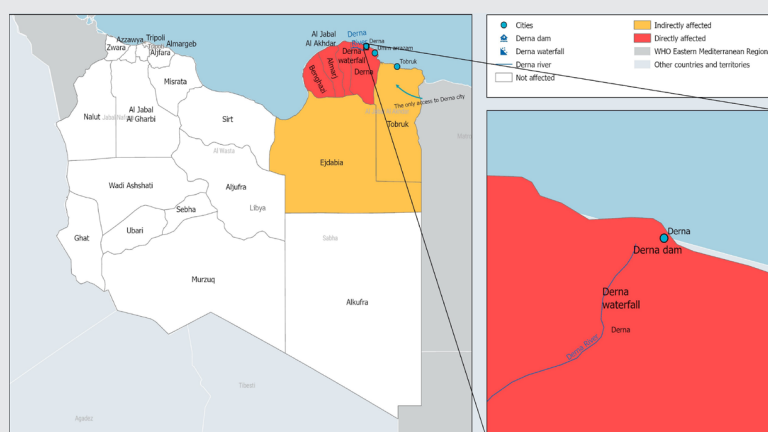


4006
deaths

BACKGROUND

On 10 September 2023, Tropical Storm Daniel hit the eastern coast of Libya, leading to floods that affected the cities of Al Bayda, Al Marj, Battah, Benghazi, Derna, Shahat and Sousa. The flooding led to the collapse of two dams above Derna, causing a deadly inundation of water to the city.

Fig. 2. Areas of eastern Libya affected by Tropical Storm Daniel



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RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

- The WHO Country Office in Libya, in collaboration with 30 partners, provided immediate support to the Libyan Ministry of Health, leading the health emergency response in the affected areas.
- WHO supported the Ministry of Health in activating public health emergency operations centres in Al Bayda and Benghazi to enhance the country's emergency response.
- Two chartered planes carrying 34 metric tonnes of medical supplies from WHO's logistics hub in Dubai arrived in Benghazi on 16 September 2023.
- WHO experts were deployed to Libya to support health operations. They restored health services functionality through distributing interagency health kits to 17 health centres.
- WHO conducted a functionality assessment of 240 health facilities in the affected areas as at 10 October 2023. Most of the facilities (87%) were not fully functional, with 73% partially functional and 14% nonfunctional.
- WHO supported the country in scaling up mental health and psychosocial support services.
- WHO supported the country in raising awareness among the affected population of both mental health support and the Safe Water, Healthy Lives campaign to promote the urgent need for safe water.



Logistics hub supplies arrive in Libya on 16 September 2023.
Photo credit: WHO/WHO Libya

Morocco: Earthquake

SITUATION AS AT 11 OCTOBER 2023



2946
deaths



>5800
injured

BACKGROUND

On the evening of 8 September 2023, Morocco was hit by an earthquake measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale. This earthquake has left an indelible mark on Morocco's seismic history, as the country's most severe earthquake in more than a century.

The earthquake's epicentre was in Al Haouz province, resulting in far-reaching consequences that extended to at least 10 provinces across the nation. More than 320 000 individuals were directly affected by the earthquake's devastating impact.

According to the Government of Morocco, as at 11 October 2023, the earthquake had caused at least 2946 deaths and at least 5800 people had been injured – with more deaths and injuries likely to have gone unrecorded at the time owing to challenges such as bodies being buried beneath rubble. Among the identified injured, 1139 people were

seriously injured while 4661 people received minor injuries.

Prior to this event, Morocco had experienced nine earthquakes with a magnitude of M5 or higher since 1900, but none of these previous events had reached or exceeded the intensity of M6.

As of September 2023, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Morocco has been using 12 455 mobile units and 5845 hospital networks to better cater to the needs of 18 475 hard-to-reach affected people. According to national authorities, the Government of Morocco has mobilized 1268 doctors, 1700 nurses, 2400 emergency beds, 800 ambulances and 300 tonnes of medical mobile units and mobile pharmacies to reinforce the medical response.



A man looks at the remains of a small city destroyed by the earthquake in Morocco.

Photo credit: © UNICEF / Benkirane

Morocco: Earthquake

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

- As of 30 September 2023, WHO has been working closely with national counterparts to establish a medium- and long-term action plan to support Morocco's recovery from the effects of the earthquake.
- WHO has also been engaging with the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator for an integrated UN response and to advocate – through embassy contacts in Morocco – for donors to raise additional funds for the recovery.
- Aerial missions, especially to areas otherwise inaccessible by land, were implemented immediately to deliver aid and to rescue and evacuate the injured. Drones have also been used to provide real-time monitoring of the earthquake-affected areas.
- The Government of Morocco has confirmed that public authorities are diligently persisting in their efforts to care for the injured, offer shelter to the affected population, distribute food and health aid, and ensure the restoration of earthquake-damaged roads. Simultaneously, they have been mobilizing all necessary resources to address the far-reaching ramifications of the earthquake.
- Essential human resources – pilots, technicians and medical personnel – have been deployed. Ambulances from the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces, the Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection were prepared so that they could swiftly transport the evacuated injured to hospitals.
- Dedicated teams of medical professionals, comprising doctors and nurses from the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, provided medical assistance to injured individuals. Further, emergency medical teams originating from Qatar, Spain, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have been actively deployed in the field to provide additional support.
- Urgent reconstruction projects were implemented, including to reconstruct and upgrade over 1000 schools, upgrade 42 local health centres, shore up historic sites, and reinforce and restore mosques, zaouias and mausoleums.
- With WHO support and coordination, a comprehensive evaluation of the earthquake was carried out, and the event categorized as a Grade 2 emergency. An Incident Management Team was established at the WHO Country Office in Morocco and an incident management system structure has been established at the regional and headquarters levels to facilitate the efficient coordination and management of the emergency response. As of 30 September 2023, a regular three-level call has been scheduled to convene once a week, as a crucial part of information exchange and decision-making.
- As of 30 September 2023, ongoing efforts have been dedicated to developing a comprehensive and integrated UN response plan. Additional services to enhance epidemic intelligence, prevent epidemics and ensure the continuity of health services and other work areas have been prioritized. WHO chairs the UN health task force for earthquake response.



Ongoing efforts are dedicated to supporting Morocco's recovery from the effects of the earthquake.

Photo credit: © UNICEF/Benkirane

Sudan: Armed conflict and cholera outbreak

SITUATION AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023



1265
deaths



14 573
injured



18
humanitarian
workers killed



56
attacks on
health care

BACKGROUND

Armed conflict

On 15 April 2023, armed conflict erupted in Khartoum and expanded to other states across the country, mainly in the Darfur and Kordofan regions (North Kordofan and, more recently, South Kordofan). From 15 April to 8 September 2023, at least 1265 people were killed and 14 573 injured. At least 18 humanitarian workers were killed in this period, and there were 56 attacks on health care, leading to 11 deaths and 38 injuries, as well as disruption of health and nutrition services. Khartoum International Airport closed, and Port Sudan New International Airport replaced it as the country's main international airport.

According to the International Organization for Migration, by 3 October 2023, 5.46 million people had been newly displaced. This includes 4 425 083 internally displaced people, most of them displaced to the East Darfur (11%), South Darfur (11%), River Nile (11%), Gezira (8%) and Northern (8%) states. More than 1.2 million people have fled to neighbouring countries, most of them to Chad (40%), Egypt (26%) and South Sudan (24%).

About 24.7 million people need humanitarian aid, of whom 18.1 million have been targeted for aid as per the Revised Humanitarian Response Plan 2023, launched in May 2023. In addition, 11 million people need urgent health assistance, of whom 7.6 million have been targeted for response. Moreover, 4 million women and girls are at increased risk of gender-based violence.

On 27 July 2023, amid the ongoing conflict, one of the parties in conflict occupied the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory, a national veterinary reference laboratory, in Soba, Khartoum state. The laboratory is therefore not performing its vital roles in diagnosis of diseases in animals, in research or in vaccine production for livestock.



People fleeing conflict in Khartoum wait to be relocated to displacement camps in Gezira state.

Photo credit: WHO/A. Kheir

Cholera outbreak

On 26 September 2023, the Federal Ministry of Health's national focal point for the International Health Regulations (2005) declared a cholera outbreak in Gedaref state.

From 28 June to 30 September 2023, 799 cholera cases, including 42 deaths (CFR: 5%), were reported from across the South Kordofan (346 cases and 8 deaths; CFR: 2%), Gedaref (344 cases and 21 deaths; CFR: 6%) and Khartoum (109 cases and 13 deaths; CFR: 11%) states.

Of 66 cultures tested in Gedaref state, 22 were positive for *Vibrio cholerae* (17 Ogawa serotype, 4 Inaba serotype and 1 without serotyping), confirming the outbreak.

Besides cholera, the country is also facing other epidemics, such as dengue fever, malaria and measles.

Sudan: Armed conflict and cholera outbreak

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

Conflict and displacement

- On 29 August 2023, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Protocols were activated, which will remain in place until 28 February 2024. The protocols provide a set of concrete actions through which the humanitarian community responds to emergencies.
- WHO supplied Sudan with eight emergency and trauma care specialists to support hospitals in eight states.
- WHO provided Sudan with 18 mobile and fixed clinics in eight states: Gezira, Kassala, Khartoum, North Darfur, Northern, Red Sea, Sinnar and White Nile states. Over 40 000 medical consultations have been dispensed since the clinics began their operations.
- WHO continued to support the clinics at three points of entry in the Northern and White Nile states.
- WHO and partners participated in an interagency rapid needs assessment for internally displaced people in North Kordofan.
- Psychiatric clinics are supported by WHO in the Gezira, Northern, Red Sea and River Nile states, while a clinic in Gedaref state has been reactivated.



One of the WHO-supported mobile clinics in Sudan.

Photo credit: WHO/WHO Sudan

verification of outbreaks and effective monitoring of morbidity patterns. Additionally, comprehensive training plans for surveillance and response teams have been finalized to scale up EWARS to all sentinel sites in Sudan.

- WHO conducted supportive supervision for the infection prevention and control (IPC) programme in hospitals and primary health care centres in the Blue Nile, Gedaref, Gezira, Kassala, Northern, Red Sea, Sennar and White Nile states.
- IPC training was conducted for health workers in response to the cholera outbreak in Gedaref state.
- Haemodialysis supplies for 60 000 sessions were procured to treat people with kidney failure.
- More than 100 severe acute malnutrition kits were distributed across 11 states.
- Training on infant and young child feeding and community-based management of acute malnutrition was provided to 25 health and nutrition cadres in six localities.
- Partners in River Nile state were trained in treating malnourished children with cholera or acute watery diarrhoea in collaboration with the nutrition sector.
- WHO provided human resources support, in the form of financial support for staff salaries, to six maternity and paediatric hospitals in Khartoum state.
- WHO and the Federal Ministry of Health designed risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) material for the Risk Communication and Community Engagement/Infection Prevention and Control National Committee.
- At the Galabat point of entry in Gedaref state, WHO supported RCCE and vector control activities for ongoing suspected cases of viral haemorrhagic fevers and acute watery diarrhoea.

Cholera outbreak

- The incident management system has been activated to help control the cholera outbreak.
- An outbreaks dashboard has been updated and shared with all Health and WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Cluster partners for a better response.
- As of 30 September 2023, WHO has coordinated with the Federal Ministry of Health and health partners to report epidemiological data from health facilities in Sudan, including in Darfur and Kordofan, through WHO's Early Warning, Alert and Response System (EWARS). This will ensure timely detection and



WHO personnel prepare medical supplies for delivery to health facilities and displacement camps.

Photo credit: WHO/A. Kheir



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