

Yemen cholera epidemic: Cases exceed 500,000 in four months

The number of suspected cases of cholera resulting from an epidemic in war-torn Yemen has reached 500,000, the World Health Organization (WHO) says.

At least 1,975 people have died since the waterborne disease began to spread rapidly at the end of April.

The WHO said the overall caseload had declined since July, but that 5,000 people a day were still being infected.

The disease spread due to deteriorating hygiene and sanitation conditions and disruptions to the water supply.

More than 14 million people are cut off from regular access to clean water and sanitation in Yemen, and waste collection has ceased in major cities.

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- Yemen's cholera epidemic 'largest ever recorded'

Cholera is an acute diarrhoeal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholera*.

Most of those infected will have no or mild symptoms but, in severe cases, the disease can kill within hours if left untreated.

More than a quarter of those who have died and 41% of those who have been infected have been children, according to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Yemen's health service has struggled to cope with the cholera epidemic – currently the largest in the world – with more than half of all medical facilities closed due to damage sustained during more than two years of conflict between pro-government forces and the rebel Houthi movement.

The WHO said shortages in medicines and supplies were persistent and

widespread, and that 30,000 health workers had not been paid in almost a year.

“Yemen’s health workers are operating in impossible conditions,” said the WHO’s director general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

“Thousands of people are sick, but there are not enough hospitals, not enough medicines, not enough clean water.

“These doctors and nurses are the backbone of the health response – without them we can do nothing in Yemen. They must be paid their wages so that they can continue to save lives.”

The WHO’s director of emergency operations, Rick Brennan, meanwhile told the BBC that despite the “downward trend” in the number of cases, the rainy season might result in “spikes” during August and September.

Dr Tedros called on all sides in Yemen’s conflict, which has killed more than 8,160 people and injured 46,330 since March 2015, to urgently find a political solution.

“The people of Yemen cannot bear it much longer – they need peace to rebuild their lives and their country,” he added.

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