



ICRC | Yemen: Health system at breaking point as cholera spreads at unprecedented rate

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Geneva/Sana'a – As the number of suspected cholera cases in Yemen reaches unprecedented levels, with one in every 200 Yemenis suspected of having been infected with the disease, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is stepping up its response to the crisis. The Yemen public health system is under massive strain due to the ongoing conflict in the country and has no capacity to care for the population.

“More than 5,000 suspected new cases have been reported daily during the past week. The spread of the disease, which started just over a month ago, is accelerating,” said the ICRC’s health coordinator in Yemen, Maria del Pilar Bauza Moreno. “It’s concerning that severe suspected cholera cases now account for about half of the total, which is more than double what we usually observe during such outbreaks,” added Ms Bauza Moreno. According to the health authorities in the capital, Sana’a, the number of suspected cases nationwide exceeded 124,000 two days ago, with more than 900 people dead as a result of infection.

“Two years of armed conflict have brought Yemen’s health system to the brink of collapse. This cholera outbreak is only the most recent, and most visible, proof that people and structures have been seriously weakened by the way this conflict is being waged,” said the ICRC’s head of delegation in Yemen, Alexandre Faite. “The attacks on and lack of maintenance of the water and sewage systems in addition to the severe restrictions on the import of critical goods such as spare parts and fuel, have led to a situation where millions of people have no access to clean water.”

The ICRC, in conjunction with the Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS), has swiftly responded to a crisis that led the health authorities in Sana’a to declare a state of emergency on 14 May. Four ICRC charter planes carrying large quantities of chlorine, IV fluids and other medical supplies, have been flown to Yemen over the past weeks. ICRC health staff and engineers are working around the clock to support health facilities and detention centres in 14 governorates, improve case management, overall hygiene and sanitation conditions, and raise cholera awareness among the general public. Cholera is a water borne disease that can spread rapidly in densely populated areas with deteriorated hygiene and poor sanitation conditions.

The ICRC is also bringing 200,000 vials of insulin to Sana’a and Aden, to support health structures that are struggling to treat patients with chronic conditions, such as diabetes.