

# Embattled Sahel facing deadly cholera outbreak

July 10 2012

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The conflict in Mali could turn a cholera outbreak that has already killed 60 people in the Sahel this year into a serious regional epidemic, the UN children's agency said Tuesday.

While the semi-arid belt running across Africa, separating Sahara from savannah, is regularly hit by cholera outbreaks, this year's epidemic has concentrated mostly around Mali and Niger, UNICEF said in a statement.

This has been aggravated by the the massive displacement of people fleeing conflict in northern Mali, and further endangers children already suffering acute malnutrition.

"Malnutrition, [displacement](#), and now rains in some parts of the Sahel create the ideal [breeding ground](#) for cholera, which hits young children hardest," said Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF acting regional director for West and Central Africa.

Last week, an outbreak in northern Mali left two children dead and 34 other people sick, according to Mali's Ministry of Health.

Since March northern Mali has been occupied by armed groups dominated by Islamists who have enforced sharia law and destroyed ancient cultural treasures.

The [UNICEF](#) statement said that overall in 2012, some 700 people in

West and [Central Africa](#) had died from cholera and more than 29,000 cases were reported.

Cases had shot up in the Sahel since mid-June, especially near the Niger River where that country's [health ministry](#) reported nearly three times as many cholera patients compared to the same period last year.

In Niger some 400,000 children are expected to require life-saving treatment for severe malnutrition this year.

Crops failed across a massive swathe of eight countries after late and erratic rains in 2011, leaving some 23 million people across the Sahel facing hunger, aid agencies have reported.

However funding needs have not been met.

"You can't treat malnutrition and ignore cholera," said Fontaine. "But without more funding soon, we risk undoing a lot of work already done to treat and prevent malnutrition in children."

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Citation: Embattled Sahel facing deadly cholera outbreak (2012, July 10) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-07-embattled-sahel-deadly-cholera-outbreak.html>

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