

UN sounds alarm on South Sudan hepatitis E outbreak

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The UN's refugee agency warned Friday that an outbreak of hepatitis E among refugees in South Sudan was worsening and that it did not have the needed funds to contain it.

"With funding depleted for our operations in South Sudan, UNHCR is warning today that the capacity to contain an outbreak of hepatitis E among the refugee population is increasingly stretched," agency spokesman Adrian Edwards lamented to reporters in Geneva.

The UNHCR and other aid organisations were already battling a hepatitis E outbreak in Upper Nile and Unity states—"two regions where the disease is endemic and where 175,000 Sudanese refugees are settled," he explained.

Some 1,050 cases of the virus, which is spread through the consumption of contaminated food and water and which damages the liver, had been detected in the refugee camps, he said.

So far, 26 people have died from the disease in camps in the Upper Nile—10 of them since mid-September.

And the situation was expected to get worse, Edwards said, pointing out that insecurity in the neighbouring Sudan regions of South Kordofan and Blue Nile was expected to push thousands of new refugees across the border and into the outbreak zone as soon as roads soon become passable after the rainy season.

The risk of hepatitis E "is high in densely populated settings such as refugee camps," he explained, adding that the danger "is further exacerbated in the rainy season due to flooding and poor sanitation," and that women and small children were most at risk.

The UNHCR has asked for \$186 million (146.2 million euros) for its work in South Sudan this year, but Edwards said it so far had received only 40 percent of that amount.

"UNHCR needs a minimum of \$20 million until the end of there to keep up basic lifesaving activities" in South Sudan, he said.

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