

# First oral cholera vaccination push launches in Yemen

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The World Health Organization and other global agencies have launched the first oral cholera vaccination campaign in Yemen, aiming to reach millions of people in the war-torn country.

More than 2,200 people have died of the waterborne infection over the past year in Yemen, with another one million suspected cases across the country.

The first phase of the oral campaign targets more than 350,000 people in the southern province of Aden, according to a joint announcement by WHO, the United Nations children's agency UNICEF, the World Bank and the vaccine alliance Gavi.

Enough doses had been procured to cover all areas at risk in Yemen, WHO said, but talks were still underway with authorities across the country.

"There has been a large allocation of vaccines from the global taskforce... of about 4.6 million doses, so enough doses have been procured," said Michael J. Ryan, WHO assistant director-general.

WHO was still negotiating with authorities in north Yemen and Sanaa, both controlled by the Shiite Huthi rebels, to extend the campaign across the country.

"As of yet we don't have established dates for those campaigns, but... the

international community is on stand-by to move just as soon as we get those necessary approvals," Ryan said.

Ryan warned conditions were ideal for another, and potentially worse, cholera outbreak come rainy season.

Research published this month in *The Lancet Global Health* journal warned that, based on data from previous outbreaks, 54 percent of districts in Yemen could be affected by an epidemic flare-up in 2018, putting more than 13.8 million people at risk.

Cholera, which causes potentially deadly diarrhoea, is contracted by ingesting food or water contaminated with a bacterium carried in human faeces and spread through poor sanitation and dirty drinking water.

Left untreated, it can kill within hours.

The UN has described Yemen as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with the country's conflict having a devastating impact on the population's health.

Some 10,000 people have been killed since March 2015 in the war between Saudi-backed pro-government forces and Iran-backed Huthi rebels in Yemen.

The rebels, which control the capital and much of northern Yemen, drove the government out of Sanaa and into Aden in 2015.

The conflict has pushed Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, to the brink of famine.

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