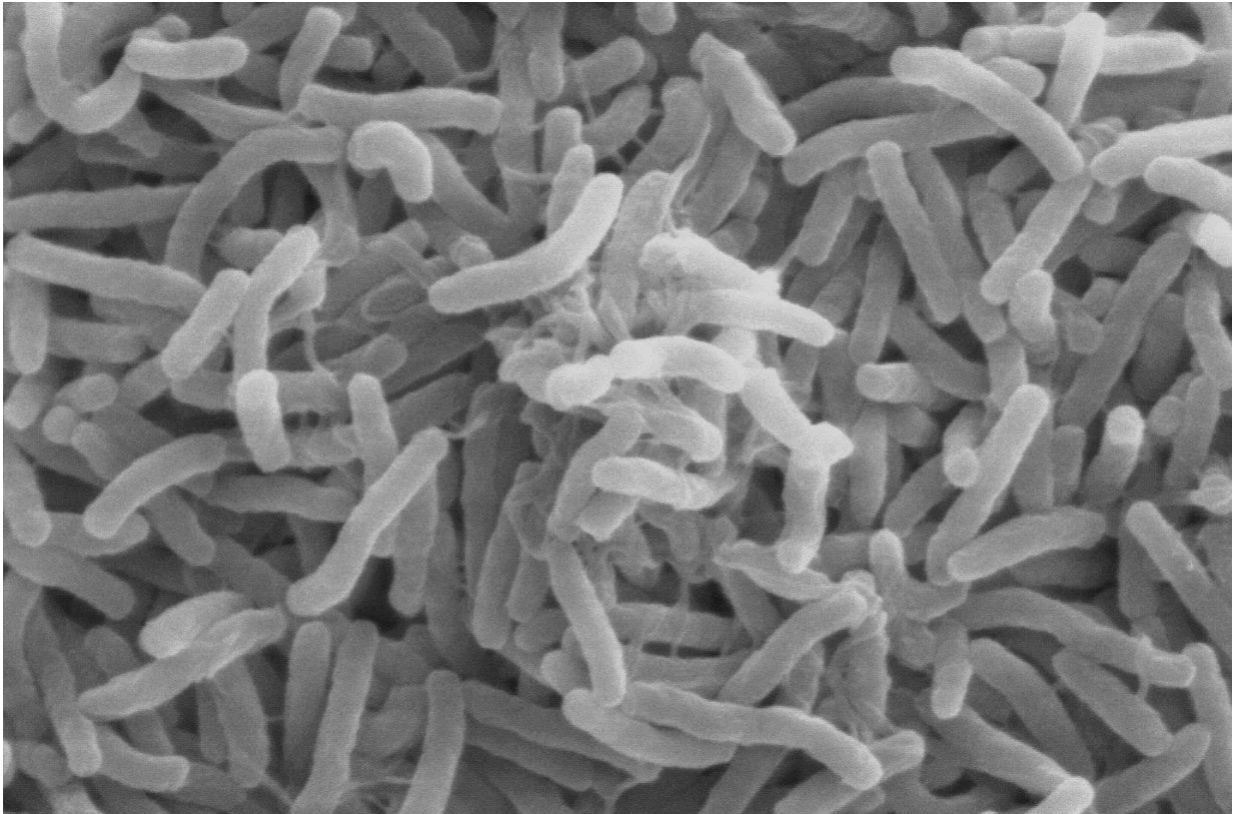


Old foe, cholera, returns to haunt Algeria

August 30 2018



Scanning electron microscope image of *Vibrio cholerae*. Credit: Wikipedia

Outside a hospital in Algeria, worried relatives arrive daily in a desperate bid to talk to those quarantined inside—the victims of the country's first cholera outbreak in more than 20 years.

Cases began appearing in early August and two people have so far died,

with scores hospitalised in Boufarik, about 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Algiers.

Said, whose mother has been quarantined for 10 days, told AFP he is "tired and demoralised".

"I want to visit my mother. But they do not allow me access", he said.

Only suspected cholera admissions, confirmed cases and staff are allowed into Boufarik hospital's [infectious diseases](#) department, where 91 people have been quarantined.

For others, access is "formally forbidden", said manager Reda Daghbouche.

If they are fit enough to leave their beds, patients on the ground floor can talk to their loved ones through the windows.

Standing a metre (yard) or so in front of an open window with blue shutters, three women covered their mouths with veils or handkerchiefs, as they exchanged a few words with a relative.

And truck driver Fatah spoke through the bars of a locked door to his mother—one of 59 confirmed cases.

"Thank God, she is now on her two feet—when we brought her to the hospital she was in a serious condition, we thought we'd lose her", he said.

Fatah has visited his mother every day for 12 days and "hopes for her release very soon".

Suspect watermelons

Patients arriving at the hospital with acute watery diarrhoea and vomiting—key cholera symptoms—are immediately placed in isolation.

Samples are sent to the Pasteur Institute, the national body in charge of infectious diseases, to test for *Vibrio cholerae* bacteria.

Patients are rehydrated while they await results.

"Analysis takes from three to seven days", said Daghbouche.

Those who test negative are sent home, while confirmed cases are kept in hospital until tests show the *Vibrio* bug has disappeared.

In the hospital yard, a 35-year-old man kicked his heels, not quite sure what to do with himself.

He told AFP he has been cured of cholera, after eight days in hospital.

But around 10 of his relatives are still hospitalised, he added, declining to give his name.

Residents of Boufarik who live close to the hospital do not disguise their concern.

Many are poorly informed about cholera, which is transmitted through infected faecal matter, often via contaminated water or food.

A grocer told AFP he wears medical gloves in case "the banknotes are contaminated".

While the authorities insist tap water has not been compromised, the cost of mineral water has soared.

And anti-bacterial gel has sold out locally.

Meanwhile, watermelons—allegedly the origin of the outbreak, since they absorb large quantities of untreated water—won't sell for any price.

On Tuesday, 16 patients were allowed to go home from Boufarik [hospital](#).

An elderly man jumped for joy, as he saw his daughter leave the isolation wing after 10 days inside.

He kissed the security guards who had stopped him from entering the wing.

The released patients ran to their relatives' cars, desperate to leave.

Those who remain in quarantine are like "prisoners waiting to be pardoned", said Fatah, disappointed that his mother remains inside.

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