

Climate change fuelling cholera surge: WHO

December 16 2022, by Robin MILLARD



Haiti has seen more than 1,200 confirmed cases of cholera.

Climate change is fuelling a global cholera upsurge, the WHO said Friday, warning the situation was compounded by vaccine shortages and will only worsen unless it is stamped out soon.

The World Health Organization is responding to [cholera outbreaks](#) in 29

countries, including Haiti, which has more than 1,200 confirmed cases, more than 14,000 suspected cases and more than 280 reported deaths.

This week, Haiti received almost 1.2 million doses of oral [cholera](#) vaccines.

But the WHO said that vaccine stockpiles were extremely low—and that manufacturers were not enthusiastic about producing a vaccine chiefly aimed at some of the poorest countries in the world.

"If we don't control the outbreak now, the situation will get worse and worse," Philippe Barboza, the WHO's team lead on cholera, told reporters in Geneva.

He said fatality rates are extremely high for most of the countries for which the UN health agency has data.

Cholera is contracted from a bacterium that is generally transmitted through [contaminated food](#) or water.

It causes diarrhoea and vomiting, and can be especially dangerous for young children.

"The factors which drive cholera are still the same: poverty, vulnerability and people who do not have access to clean water," Barboza said.

These are amplified by conflict, humanitarian crises and [natural disasters](#), which reduce access to drinking water.

Vaccine shortage

"But this year, we have a factor which is even more important: the direct impact of climate change, with a succession of major droughts,

unprecedented floods in certain parts of the world, and cyclones which have amplified most of these epidemics," he said.

Barboza said that while there had been big epidemics in certain countries before, they had not happened simultaneously, as now.

Although cholera can kill within hours, it can be treated with simple oral rehydration, and antibiotics for more severe cases.

But many people lack timely access to such treatment.

Outbreaks can be prevented by ensuring access to clean water and improving surveillance.

"It is not acceptable in the 21st century to have people dying of a disease which is very well-known and very easy to treat," said Barboza.

Around 36 million cholera vaccine doses were produced this year

Barboza said that making these doses was not very attractive to manufacturers as it is "a [vaccine](#) for poor countries".

But he insisted that the mortality rate could be reduced by prioritising timely access to medical aid.

"The fight against cholera is not lost. We can win it," he said.

© 2022 AFP

Citation: Climate change fuelling cholera surge: WHO (2022, December 16) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-12-climate-fuelling-cholera-surge.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.