

Hundreds dead from dengue fever in war-torn Sudan: medics

September 25 2023



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Outbreaks of dengue fever and acute watery diarrhea have "killed hundreds" in war-torn Sudan, medics reported on Monday, warning of "catastrophic spreads" that could overwhelm the country's decimated

health system.

In a statement, the Sudanese doctors' union warned that the health situation in the southeastern state of Gedaref, on the border with Ethiopia, "is deteriorating at a horrific rate", with thousands infected with dengue fever.

Although Gedaref has been spared the direct effects of the brutal war between the regular army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), it has nonetheless been impacted by mass displacement and other humanitarian crises.

More than five months into the war, 80 percent of the hospitals in Sudan are out of service, according to the United Nations.

Even before the war, the fragile health care system struggled to contain the annual disease outbreaks that accompany the country's rainy season starting in June, including malaria—endemic in Sudan—and dengue fever.

This year, with Gedaref hosting upwards of 250,000 internally displaced persons according to the UN, the situation is much worse.

"The hospital's beds are all full but the cases keep coming in, particularly children," a medical source told AFP from Gedaref Hospital, requesting anonymity out of concern for his safety.

"But the number of those receiving treatment at home are much more than those at the hospital," he said.

Gedaref resident Amal Hussein told AFP that "in each home, there are at least three people sick with dengue".

Dengue is a mosquito-borne disease that causes high fever, headaches, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain and, in the most serious cases, bleeding that can lead to death.

Medics and the UN have repeatedly warned that the violence in Sudan, combined with the rainy season and devastated infrastructure, would cause disease outbreaks.

More than 1,200 children have died in refugee camps since May, due in part to a measles outbreak, according to the UN refugee agency.

'Disaster is knocking'

In El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur state, "13 cases of malaria were reported in one week", the health ministry said.

In Khartoum, "three people died of acute watery diarrhea"—suspected cases of cholera—in the Hajj Youssef district in the east of the capital, the local resistance committee said on Monday.

"Take precautions to avoid infection," urged the committee—one of many that used to organize pro-democracy demonstrations before the war and that now volunteers to help those caught in the crossfire.

Health crises have compounded the dire humanitarian situation in Sudan, where half of the population of 48 million relies on aid to survive and with six million on the brink of starvation, according to the UN.

Clementine Nkweta-Salami, the UN's humanitarian representative in Sudan, warned on Monday that "disaster is knocking on the door in Sudan".

She urged "donors to immediately disburse pledged funds to sustain life-

saving humanitarian aid".

By early September, the conflict between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, had killed nearly 7,500 people, according to a conservative estimate by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

Dozens of hospitals have been bombed or occupied by fighters, in what the UN has called "cruel disregard for civilians".

The medics and aid workers who remain are themselves regularly targeted and their stocks looted as more people demand help.

The health ministry said on Monday RSF forces had seized control of the main medical supplies warehouse.

"Medicines and medical equipment amounting to \$500 million have been lost," ministry spokesman Haitham Mohamed Ibrahim said, adding that "70 percent of the equipment in specialized centers in Khartoum... has been lost".

Even before the war, one in three Sudanese needed to walk more than an hour to gain access to medical care, and just 30 percent of vital medicines were available, according to the UN.

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Citation: Hundreds dead from dengue fever in war-torn Sudan: medics (2023, September 25) retrieved 29 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-09-hundreds-dead-dengue-fever-war-torn.html>

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