

Hundreds of suspected cholera cases in Yemen: MSF

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At least 570 suspected cases of cholera have surfaced in war-torn Yemen in the past three weeks, sparking fears of a potential epidemic, Doctors Without Borders said Sunday.

The Shiite Huthi rebels put the number of cases at 1,681 in 12 provinces, including in the north and west of the country, according to the Sabanews.net website which cited their health minister, Mohamed bin Hafedh.

Healthcare has dramatically deteriorated in Yemen as conflict between the Iran-backed rebels and the Saudi-supported government continues to escalate, leaving hospitals destroyed and millions struggling to find access to food and clean water.

The World Health Organisation now classifies Yemen as one of the worst humanitarian emergencies in the world alongside Syria, South Sudan, Nigeria and Iraq.

"We've treated more than 570 cases we suspect may be cholera over the past three weeks," Doctors Without Borders (MSF) spokesman Ghassan Abou Chaar told AFP.

"There are fears that the disease could turn into an epidemic. Two years into the war, the healthcare system has collapsed, hospitals are destroyed... and government employees' salaries have not been paid," Abou Chaar said.

He said MSF had seen a marked hike over the past week in suspected cholera cases in five provinces across the country.

A general strike in the capital Sanaa has also sparked sanitation concerns in the capital, as the streets began to flood with garbage at the weekend.

An official with Yemen's health ministry confirmed cholera had reappeared last week in Yemen, with cases reported in 10 provinces across the country.

Ministry spokesman Abdelhakim al-Kahlani told AFP two cholera-related deaths had been confirmed in Sanaa, three in the central Ibb province and four in the western Hodeida province.

Yemen has been devastated by two years of conflict between Huthi rebels and forces loyal to President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, including a Saudi-led military coalition.

The Huthis control the capital, much of the Red Sea coastline and the northern province that borders Saudi Arabia.

The United Nations estimates more than 7,700 people have been killed and millions displaced since the Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen in March 2015.

The fighting has left 19 million people—or 60 percent of the population—struggling to find food, the United Nations says, with a third of the country's provinces on the brink of famine.

A cholera and acute watery diarrhoea outbreak last year killed 99 people, with 15,658 suspected cases of cholera reported.

Cholera, a bacterial infection which causes severe diarrhoea and

dehydration, can be fatal if not treated immediately.

The infection is spread through the ingestion of faecally contaminated water or food.

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