

WHO'S RESPONSE TO CHOLERA

CONTEXT

Cholera remains a disease of inequity, disproportionately affecting the world's poorest and most vulnerable populations. The seventh global cholera pandemic, ongoing since the 1960s, has seen an upsurge in outbreaks since mid-2021. Significantly, in 2022-2023 there has been a further unprecedented surge of cholera outbreaks across the world including in countries that have not reported cholera for many years.

During 2023 at least 29 countries reported cholera outbreaks, collectively placing over one billion people directly at risk of cholera. Not only are there more simultaneous outbreaks across the world with greater geographic spread, but the outbreaks are larger and more deadly than before, compounded by the effects of climate change. Overall, the current number, size and concurrence of multiple outbreaks, the spread to areas free of cholera for decades and alarmingly high mortality rates present a major threat to global health security.

At the same time, the current global cholera response capacity continues to be strained due to the global lack of resources, including shortages of the oral cholera vaccine (OCV) and cholera supplies, as well as overstretched medical personnel, who are dealing with multiple parallel disease outbreaks and while also responding to complex humanitarian emergencies.

In addition, efforts to strengthen cholera control measures at the country level have suffered from decades of poor investment in the WASH and health sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic response put health systems under immense stress and resulted in competition for funding and human resources. Hard-won gains have shown to be insufficient against the effects of climate change and its related natural disasters. As the climate emergency worsens, human displacement will continue to intensify, along with droughts and flooding – all conditions that give rise to and worsen cholera outbreaks.

WHO 2024 RESPONSE STRATEGY

As outlined in WHO's Global Strategic Preparedness, Readiness and Response Plan (SPRP) 2023-24, WHO and its partners will continue to support Member States to prevent, prepare for and respond to ongoing cholera outbreaks on a global scale.

WHO's strategy revolves around three key elements:

1. Early detection and rapid response, based on interventions such as robust community engagement, strengthening early warning surveillance and laboratory capacities, improving health systems and supply readiness, and establishing rapid response teams. WHO will continue to work at country-level to empower communities to drive and sustain readiness and response to cholera outbreaks, and to adopt and sustain preventative, protective and care-seeking behaviours.

2. A targeted multi-sectoral approach to prevent cholera recurrence. The strategy urges countries and partners to focus on multisectoral interventions (PAMIs) in priority areas heavily affected by cholera. Cholera transmission can be stopped in these areas through measures including improved WASH, decentralized care and the targeted use of OCV. WHO will strengthen planning, preparedness, capacity-building, case management and monitoring of interventions at country-level, as well as infection prevention and control, and community engagement measures. WHO will continue to support countries by supplying lifesaving medical supplies, such as cholera kits.

3. An effective mechanism of coordination for technical support, advocacy, resource mobilization, and partnership at local and global levels. As Health Cluster lead and the host of the Global Task Force on Cholera Control (GTFFC), WHO will continue to enhance multi-partner and multi-sector coordination, including in partnership with governments, NGOs, civil-society, other UN agencies, donors and other partners, to promote cholera prevention and when deliver a coordinated public health response where needed.

2024 FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

Funding requirement by response pillar and by country	African Region	Region of the Americas	Eastern Mediterranean Region	Global Support	Total
P1. Leadership, coordination, planning, and monitoring	4 203	645	113	222	5 182
P2. Risk communication and community engagement	2 168	1 982	119	54	4 324
P3. Surveillance, case investigation and contact tracing	5 029	4 666	3 119		12 814
P4. Travel, trade and points of entry		50	18		68
P5. Diagnostics and testing	1 166	2 115	333	32	3 645
P6. Infection prevention and control	1 712	162	72	23	1 969
P7. Case management and therapeutics	2 896	3 608	1 229	109	7 842
P8. Operational support and logistics	8 863	1 290	45		10 198
P9. Essential health systems and services			90		90
P10. Vaccination	3 020		95		3 115
P11. Research, innovation and evidence	618		9		627
Total	29 676	14 518	5 240	439	49 874

A child receives the oral cholera vaccine in Isinya, Kajiado.

Photo: WHO / Billy Miaron