



WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: MENINGITIS

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 183 countries.

In Brief

This DREF Bulletin is being issued based on the situation described below reflecting the information available at this time. CHF 200,000 (USD 163,934 or EUR 124,224) has been allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to respond to the needs in this operation. This operation is expected to be implemented over 2 months, and will be completed by 5 May 2007; a Final Report will be made available three months after the end of the operation. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are encouraged.

This operation is aligned with the International Federation's Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

The situation

Yearly outbreaks of meningitis are registered along the meningitis belt in Africa, which stretches across the continent – from Senegal in the West to Ethiopia in the East – and includes all or part of 15 to 18 countries, majority being in West and Central Africa. The outbreaks mainly occur throughout the dry season (between January and May).

An increased number of meningitis cases has been registered in several countries since January 2007. Burkina Faso is the hardest hit country so far, with over 2,700 cases and more than 250 deaths as at week seven.

Côte d'Ivoire, which shares a border with Burkina Faso, reported several cases, and at the end of week seven, they had increased to more than 150, with 30 deaths. The Ivorian Ministry of Health, a Red Cross partner in health issues, has proposed a vaccination campaign to confine the outbreak in the northern districts of the country. The campaign will be conducted with the support of partners, including the Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), other countries in the region are also affected, but to a lesser extent. The latest available reliable regional data (week six) shows a total of over 3,200 cases and over 400 deaths throughout the region. The most affected countries include Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Chad. Some of these countries have already surpassed the alert (five) and epidemic (one) thresholds in some of their districts.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action taken so far

In Burkina Faso, the Burkinabe Red Cross Society has been active for the last few weeks. On 14 February 2006, the national society received assistance from the International Federation in the form of a CHF 70,000 DREF allocation and has been assisting the government in a vaccination campaign and social mobilization activities. Unfortunately, the number of cases and deaths has almost doubled hence additional assistance is needed to continue to fight the outbreak.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire will assist in a vaccination campaign to be carried out by the government in the affected northern districts. Red Cross volunteers have already started social mobilization activities in the targeted areas.

Similar activities are being carried out in the other affected countries, where national societies are collaborating with their respective governments to control the epidemic.

Coordination

National societies are working in close collaboration with ministries of health and regional health authorities in their respective countries. The coordination and technical assistance of this regional operation will be provided by the Federation country delegation in Chad, the sub-regional offices in Dakar (Senegal), Lagos (Nigeria) and Yaoundé (Cameroon), and the regional delegation in Dakar.

The Needs

Because meningitis is spread through human-to-human contact only, and given the importance of cross-border movements in the region, the epidemic is more likely to spread to neighbouring countries. Given the increase of cases during this year's dry season and the ongoing outbreaks in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and other countries, an early response – even to the smaller scale outbreaks – is needed. This will ensure increased preparedness among the national societies and, subsequently, they will assist their ministries of health in preventing further spreading of the epidemic.

Plan of Action

In addition to the CHF 70,000 earlier allocated to the Burkinabe Red Cross Society (see [DREF Bulletin no. MDRBF003](#)), the Federation has provided a further CHF 200,000 from its DREF to support the national societies of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Chad in strengthening their volunteer capacities. The national societies will attain this by conducting refresher training on meningitis for Red Cross volunteers and increasing social mobilization as well as information sharing in the affected and high-risk regions.

Strategy

National societies in the affected countries will work closely with their ministries of health and will support government efforts through community-based activities. Red Cross action will focus on:

- Social mobilization;
- Community training;
- Capacity building activities;
- Early case identification.

Objective: The Red Cross will contribute to the control of the epidemic in the eight directly-affected countries in the region during the next two months.

Activities

- Train 250 volunteers and 25 supervisors, in each country, on health education and hygiene promotion;
- Organize community mobilization and sensitization activities in the most affected and endangered regions;
- Conduct community sensitization and deliver key messages on hygiene and prevention, using the 250 trained volunteers in each country;
- Increase preparedness activities in affected and neighbouring districts of each country;
- Early case identification and referral activities;
- Publish and disseminate information, education and communication (IEC) materials;
- Deliver key messages on hygiene and prevention to rural communities through radio broadcasts.

Expected results

- 2,000 volunteers and 225 supervisors are trained;
- 1,000,000 people are reached through sensitization activities;
- IEC materials are produced and distributed;
- The meningitis outbreak is controlled.

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in Disaster Relief and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

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