

## ***CAMEROON: MENINGITIS OUTBREAK***

*1 March 2001*

*Information Bulletin N° 1*

### ***The Disaster***

Since January 2001, health authorities in the north-west province of Cameroon have reported multiple cases of meningitis in two districts: Wum and Mbengwi. Epidemic thresholds were reached in both districts by the end of January. The northern region of Cameroon is regularly affected by outbreaks of meningococcal meningitis type A (+C). However, in recent years, this province has not recorded outbreaks of the disease and thus no vaccination campaign has been conducted in the last five years.

At the request of the government, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) made an assessment of the epidemic in the affected province. As of 21 February, 270 cases were reported with 22 deaths. These statistics may indicate a lower caseload than in reality, since the epidemic is affecting populations living in remote areas and, furthermore, new cases are reported daily.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has set up a coordinating commission, the membership of which includes the Cameroon Red Cross Society. The commission is responsible for epidemic control activities. The MoH has provided 48,300 doses of vaccine; unfortunately there are no further supplies of vaccine available at central level and the MoH therefore requested assistance from partners within the commission.

### ***Red Cross/Red Crescent and Partner Agencies' Action***

In a coordination meeting held on 19 February with UNICEF, the WHO, GTZ, MSF, the Ministry of Health and the Cameroon Red Cross Society / Federation, results of the MSF evaluation were shared and a plan of action developed. MSF is providing 280,000 doses of vaccine with 280,000 auto destruct-syringes. GTZ will transport the vaccine to the field, ensure the cold chain and the WHO will handle customs clearance of the vaccines in order to facilitate the operation. At the request of the MoH, the Cameroon Red Cross Society will be responsible for assisting the Ministry of Health through mobilisation of the population in the affected areas.

Supported by a two person team from headquarters, the local branch of the National Society has mobilised a hundred volunteers to organise the vaccination campaign, assist in surveillance and early detection of cases and organise teams for crowd control and registration of patients. In addition, dissemination and awareness-raising activities will be carried out through the distribution of leaflets by volunteers to the population in areas which are not affected by the outbreak. The regional health delegate and a member of the health team will provide support over a five day period in the province.

It is planned to vaccinate all persons living in the areas where cases of meningitis have been diagnosed through the assessment carried out by MSF. The population at risk is estimated at 250,000. MoH staff, supported by Red Cross volunteers, will be responsible for immunisation of the affected population and treatment of patients suffering from meningitis.

On 28 February, the Federation Secretariat released CHF 20,500 from its disaster relief emergency fund (DREF) to allow the operation to begin immediately.

## *Needs*

Donors are encouraged to contribute towards reimbursement of the DREF funds disbursed for the emergency in order to enable the National Society to carry out its essential role of social mobilisation and awareness-raising in the vaccination campaign.

Peter Rees-Gildea  
Head a.i.  
Relationship Management Department

Bekele Geleta  
Head  
Africa Department

**This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>**