

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

GUINEA / SIERRA LEONE: CHOLERA

3 September 2004

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 181 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 3/2004) is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. CHF 122,000 has been requested from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). The Federation does not anticipate further needs. Un-earmarked funds to repay DREF are needed. This operation will be reported on through the DREF update and through further Information Bulletins.

Please note that Guinea first reported on cholera through Information Bulletins 1/2004 dated 17 August (http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?rpts04/gn040817.pdf) and 2/2004 dated 25 August (http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?rpts04/gn040825.pdf). Since the outbreak of cholera affects both Guinea and Sierra Leone, this series of Information Bulletins will now include both countries. **This current Information Bulletin focuses on Sierra Leone.**

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct¹ and is committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response² in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for a full description of the national society profile, please access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

¹ Code of Conduct - <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/>

² Humanitarian Charter - <http://www.sphereproject.org/>

The Situation

Shortly after cholera cases were discovered in Kambia, a border town with Guinea (Conakry), the disease has spread quickly to other towns in Sierra Leone including the capital Freetown. The Government of Sierra Leone declared a cholera outbreak in Sierra Leone on 8 August 2004. (On 11 August 2004, the Ministry of Health of Guinea declared a cholera outbreak in their country.)

As of 27 August, the number of cholera cases in Freetown rose from 27 (with 11 deaths) to 69 (with one death).³ The Sierra Leone Ministry of Health (MoH) evaluation of 30 August 2004 reveals an increase to 561 cases country-wide with 55 deaths; this approximates a 10% mortality rate.

This cholera outbreak is the first one since 1999. The high mortality rate is attributed to overcrowding in shanty towns, the lack of drinking water (people are depending on streams, rainfall and pools of water), and the poor drainage system in the country. Also, the MoH was focusing on reconstruction of basic health facilities after the 10-year war that ended in 2002; no proper contingency plan has been put in place for timely response to outbreaks.

The needs are many and urgent to cater for at least 4000 people. Over 900 litres of chemicals must be made available for disinfection. Various drugs such as intravenous fluids and oral re-hydration solution (ORS) are needed. Supplies for the cholera treatment centres (CTC) are also needed: examination gloves, surgical spirit, chlorine tablets, cleaning materials (plastic buckets and brooms), beds, mattresses and blankets.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

From the time the outbreak in Sierra Leone was declared, there has been active participation of the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society⁴ in the different meetings of the MoH Task Force. The national society developed a contingency plan for four districts most at risk (Kambia, Freetown, Port Loko and Makeni). As part of its contingency plan, Health Officers from all 11 Sierra Leone Red Cross district structures were invited to a one-day refresher training on cholera management at the national society headquarters (25 August). At the end of the session, they were provided with cholera demonstration kits to support awareness raising activities in their communities.

The Sierra Leone Red Cross is also preparing sensitization campaigns in 16 communities and their markets in Freetown. To support this, more than 3000 leaflets on cholera have been produced. Also, over one hundred additional communities in Sierra Leone Red Cross branch operational areas will receive sensitization campaigns in order to prepare for any possible spread of the outbreak. Part of the sensitization campaigns will highlight radio discussions.

In addition to the social mobilization activities, the Sierra Leone Red Cross has provided support to the government by donating one cholera kit and 50 x 1000 tetracycline capsules, 50 x 1000 Septrin tablets, 25 litres of disinfectant and 5,000 disposable gloves.

The outbreak in Sierra Leone has regional implications for the Mano River national societies. Neighbouring Guinea declared an outbreak of cholera on 11 August 2004; as of 31 August, Guinea has suffered 333 cases of cholera with 31 deaths, approximating a 9.3% mortality rate. The main affected areas are Conakry, Forécariah, Coyah and Kindia. The latter two - Coyah and Kindia - share common borders with Sierra Leone. Although the outbreak currently seems to be under control, there is still an on-going risk of the disease spreading due to the rainy season, which will continue until the end of October.

³ Source: Ministry of Health, Disease Prevention and Control Unit; Statistics for 30 August 2004

⁴ Sierra Leone Red Cross - <http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/check.asp?countryid=152>

As part of its regional cooperation, the Sierra Leone Red Cross together with the Federation gave two cholera kits to the Red Cross Society of Guinea⁵ to boost its efforts in fighting the outbreak. There was an official presentation of the medical kits to the Ministry of health during the disaster response committee meeting held on 19 August. In addition, the Federation Mano River sub-regional office in Abidjan assisted the Red Cross of Guinea technically in carrying out a field assessment of the outbreak situation from 17-21 August 2004. (The report is available from the sub-regional office on request).

Coordination

After doing a field evaluation, the Ministry of Health has established a new cholera treatment centre (CTC) in the east end of Freetown where severe cases will be referred to and treated. Furthermore, the government has equipped the two existing functional CTC in Freetown in collaboration with partners. The government also visits the centres everyday and compiles data, which is shared with partners.

The Environmental Health and Sanitation team has conducted investigations and is carrying out regular intensive surveillance and health education. A laboratory test is needed to confirm the exact nature of the disease. The Sierra Leone government intends to give an undisclosed sum of money intended mainly for the purchase of drugs and sanitation equipments, as part of its financial contribution and donations. Other financial and material contributions came from several partners: UNICEF gave chlorine, WHO offered IV fluids, MSF-France is providing materials and volunteers for community sensitization; GOAL and its blue flag volunteers are conducting awareness-raising and hygiene-promoting campaigns in Freetown.

The task force meets twice a week under the coordination of the Director of Health to share information and identify needs. Also daily meetings are organized by the Director of Disease Prevention and Control with key partners to discuss specific strategy related issues. The Sierra Leone Red Cross regularly attends these meetings and plans to harmonise their awareness-raising strategies with MSF-France and GOAL.

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For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org/>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeals:

- *Guinea Annual Appeal 01.24/2004 - http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual04/012404.pdf*
- *Sierra Leone Annual Appeal 01.26/2004 - http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual04/012604.pdf*

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⁵ Red Cross of Guinea - <http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/check.asp?countryid=77>