

CAMBODIA: DENGUE HAEMORRHAGIC FEVER EPIDEMIC

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More than 11,300 cases of DHF have now been reported and the disease has spread to practically every part of the country. Spraying, clean-up and public health information campaigns are in full swing, as is the training of Red Cross volunteers.

The context

The epidemic of Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever (DHF) is continuing and the increase in the number of cases is sharper than predicted. According to the latest Ministry of Health figures (28 August), 11,348 children have been hospitalised since the beginning of the year and 267 children have died from the disease. The expected seasonal increase in cases was from 576 in May to 3,598 in July. By early August, more than 7,000 cases had been reported.

This year, the virus has spread to many new areas, and is now present in 18 out of 23 provinces, compared to six during the last epidemic in 1995. According to information received from the World Health Organization (WHO), the population at risk, which is usually confined to urban and peri-urban areas, has increased from 1,485,000 to most of the country's inhabitants. At highest risk are an estimated 252,000 children aged between 4 and 9 years.

Latest events

A massive, well co-ordinated, nation-wide control operation, organised by the Ministry of Health(MoH)/WHO, is continuing, supported by Red Cross and other agencies. Over 46 tons of Temophos (Abate), a larvicide that kills the vector mosquito, have been distributed to an estimated 460,000 households to help protect a total population of 2,300,000 people living in Phnom Penh and 13 of the worst affected provinces. Over 26 districts have undergone ULV (Ultra Low Volume) spraying. A health education campaign has distributed more than 450,000 leaflets giving clinical and preventive information, 14,000 posters and thousands of T-shirts. Dengue radio messages and specially prepared TV spots are broadcast regularly.

The Kantha Bopha Children's Hospital, which was full to capacity, has been provided with another 100 beds by WHO. WHO has also supported three teams of paediatricians who have been assigned to the worst-affected provinces (Battambang, Takeo, Kompong Cham) .

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

A relief flight with 32 MT of IV fluids and essential medical supplies arrived in late August. Most items were distributed immediately. The balance is awaiting the finalisation of a distribution plan with MoH/WHO.

A follow-up and planning meeting took place on 27 August between the newly trained RC volunteers in Phnom Penh, CRC HQ staff, Municipality Red Cross Branch representatives and health authorities, with support from the Japanese Red Cross bilateral delegate. A follow-up schedule was developed and further action planned.

Seven out of 23 Provincial Red Cross Branches have already organised clean up and health education campaigns in their respective provinces after they participated in a one day Dengue prevention training course in Phnom Penh on 24 August and received AusAid-donated posters and leaflets to be used for these campaigns. Other Branches will shortly be following their example. Depending on funding, it is planned that in addition to these general clean up campaigns, a special campaign will be organised in schools by Red Cross Branches.

Blood testing kits which arrived in Phnom Penh in late August were given immediately to Kantha Bopha Hospital which carries out an average of 70 blood transfusions per day and to other hospitals treating DHF cases.

One metric tonne of Abate (larvicide) arrived from Thailand on 30 August and was given to the National Malaria Centre on 3 September for distribution to the provinces.

The Federation Health Delegate (supported by the British Red Cross) arrived on 5 September on a four month assignment to assist CRC in medical logistics, the development of health education material and the training of Red Cross Volunteers (RCVs) and Red Cross Youth (RCY).

The 2nd Community Based First Aid (CBFA) training course, for 25 RCVs representing all 7 districts in Phnom Penh, commenced in the capital on 7 September. It will last eight days. Once trained, the volunteers will organise cleanup and health education campaigns in their respective communities, including in schools, in co-operation with the health and district authorities.

Outstanding needs

Despite a strong response from National Societies and several Embassies, further funding applications are being made to the international community and other institutional donors in order to fully cover the Appeal (65% coverage to date). Although funds have been received to cover the cost of the insecticide (see Situation Report number 2), additional contributions are needed for the 9 mt. of larvicide (Abate) and for the costs of the initial relief flight.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Excellent co-ordination and co-operation continues with MoH, WHO and international organisations (IOs). Contacts with a number of Embassies, ECHO and IOs take place on a regular basis.

Meanwhile national media coverage has been good with a high donor profile. News items complementing the regular health education messages are broadcast on a daily basis.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Training courses and environmental clean up campaigns have been launched very rapidly and more are being organised. These efforts have been backed up by the swift purchase and delivery of medical supplies. Donors are urged to continue support to this operation, particularly in view of the continuing -- and ominously steep -- increase in the number of cases.

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