

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

SIERRA LEONE: CHOLERA

15 February 2007

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 185 countries.

In Brief

This Bulletin (no. 01/2007) is being issued for information only, and reflects the situation and the information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

Activities undertaken are 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

From 20 January to 5 February 2007, cases of severe diarrhoea and vomiting have been reported in several parts of Sierra Leone, including the capital (Freetown). Initial laboratory tests conducted on a series of specimen collected showed presence of vibrio cholera amongst other pathogens which cause diarrhoea.

Prior to this latest epidemic, the country was just recovering from another cholera outbreak which mostly affected Kambia District and Freetown town. This earlier outbreak was confirmed by the government on 11 October 2006, after cases that had began being reported in August 2006 escalated.

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoH&S) has informed the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRCS) of the new cholera outbreak in Tonkolili District, located in the centre of Sierra Leone. So far, 90 cases (with 2 deaths) have been reported, translating to a case fatality rate of 1.8%. The worst-hit areas include Magbass and Magburaka townships. Other affected villages include Maborie, Mamunta, Mabum, Robol, Rogberay, Mafomba, Mamunabana, Manewa and Mayoro. This situation has been confirmed by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Holland and the SLRCS Tonkolili branch.

The causes attributed to the new outbreak are poor sanitation conditions and the use of unsafe drinking water by members of these communities. These unhygienic practices continue despite ongoing efforts and campaigns on behavioural change as well as sensitization on personal and environmental sanitation by various actors, including Red Cross volunteers. There are limited medical facilities in the district; the only available medical services in Magburaka Town and the whole of the Tonkolili District are government hospitals and health centres. These facilities are ill-equipped and, often, most of their services are inaccessible to many people, a lot of whom are vulnerable and already suffering from other critical socio-economic conditions such as acute poverty.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The SLRCS is supporting the MoH&S with ringer lactate, chlorine and other essential medical items to meet urgent needs of affected populations. A plan of action has been agreed upon and Red Cross volunteers have been provided with cholera kits to conduct sensitization activities. Technical support is being provided by the Federation sub- regional office in Lagos and the health department of the regional delegation in Dakar.

The cholera task force supported by the Federation regional delegation, is in contact with MSF Holland, the district medical officer and the government's Disaster Management Office to coordinate the different actions so as to bring the situation under control. This forms part of the national society's plan to increase the flow of communication between its partners, regional offices and donors.



Cholera demonstration kits and pertinent drugs to support SLRC's Tonkolili branch.

In October 2006, the Federation had allocated CHF 148,805 to the national society (from DREF) in support of its response to a cholera epidemic in Kambia District and Freetown. With the DREF funding, SLRCS volunteers have been helping in the distribution of cholera kits and drugs in established mobile units, public health units and hospitals. The volunteers have also shared their knowledge on proper hygiene and sanitation practices with communities, thereby increasing their awareness on hygiene practices and ensuring that they are able to demonstrate their ability to use these skills during disease outbreaks.

Currently, the Federation's capacity building delegate is supporting the Kambia branch of the SLRCS to organize a 10-day participatory hygiene and sanitation transformation (PHAST) training for cholera-affected communities.

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