

NIGERIA: OUTBREAK OF CEREBRO SPINAL MENINGITIS

29 February 1996

Latest events

An epidemic of 'Cerebro Spinal Meningitis' is reported to have broken out in late January 1996 in Nigeria. Although a number of curative and preventive measures were taken by the Nigerian government, the situation dramatically deteriorated in February with the epidemic spreading to many states throughout the country. Those places particularly affected are the northern areas of Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Bauchi, Jigawa, Kano, Niger and Borno.

Over 1,000 people have already died in the epidemic, and thousands more are currently being treated for the disease in hospitals and temporary isolation camps in rural areas. On 28 February, the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) reported to the Federation that the death rate is continuing to increase alarmingly. The Nigerian national newspaper, *The Guardian*, also reported yesterday that 50 persons are now dying hourly of either meningitis, gastro-enteritis or cholera in Kano state. However, this figure has to be taken with more reserve.

Nevertheless, the situation in Nigeria is extremely dangerous and the national authorities are intending to launch an international appeal for assistance. Some eight million vaccine doses have already been sent to the affected areas but more are still needed for hospitals in rural areas where the most vulnerable groups are located.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Health education to the local population in the affected areas is being provided by Nigerian Red Cross Society volunteers, which include doctors, nurses and first aiders. Some of these volunteers are also providing assistance to government medical teams.

The International Federation has decided to release CHF 100,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) today, 29 February, in order to begin supplying further assistance to the National Society. The Federation's Regional Delegation in Abidjan is in close contact with the NRCS and its first-aid delegate will travel to Nigeria from Côte d'Ivoire this weekend. She will be joined early next week by a Federation health delegate on a three-month mission to assist the NRCS in the areas of disease-prevention and health education/dissemination.

The Federation intends to follow this *Alert* with the launching later this week of an appeal to assist the NRCS deliver humanitarian and medical assistance to the affected population. Further details in relation to outstanding needs will be provided then. However, for immediate information and assistance contact Richard Hunlédé, the desk officer in charge (Telephone: (41) 22 730-4314)

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