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Hundreds of Cholera Cases Are Declared Per Day in Sudan

By Oritro Karim



UNICEF'S cholera response in Sudan. A doctor mixes an oral rehydration solution, which treats cholera. Credit: UNICEF/Ahmed Mohamdeen Elfatih

UNITED NATIONS, Jun 5 2025 (IPS) - A particularly virulent outbreak of cholera was detected in the Khartoum State of Sudan and is a direct result of the Sudanese Civil War, warns the United Nations.

"The resurgence of cholera is more than a public health emergency – it is a symptom of deep, persistent inequality. Cholera takes hold where poverty is entrenched, where healthcare is scarce, and where conflict has shattered the systems that keep children safe. Without access to safe water and sanitation and essential services, communities

are left exposed, and children are paying the price," said Joe English, the Emergency Communication Specialist of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Cholera is an acute bacterial infection caused by the consumption of contaminated food or water, which can be fatal and lead to death by dehydration if left untreated. Cases of cholera are most concentrated in Africa and South Asia, as these regions are known to be particularly sensitive to flooding, have high rates of poverty and displacement, and lack adequate water, sanitation and health (WASH) infrastructure in many areas.

UNICEF has warned that worldwide cases of cholera have nearly doubled in the past two years, with approximately 1.1 billion people being at risk of succumbing to the disease. Children under the age of five and people living in poverty face the highest risks of death as many of them also suffer from other health complications such as malnutrition.

Figures from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that there were 804,721 cases and 5,805 deaths across 33 countries in 2024, marking a 37 percent increase in cases, and a 27 percent increase in deaths from 2023. The latest figures show that there have been 157,035 cases and 2,148 deaths recorded across 26 countries in the first four months of 2025. Although cholera is difficult to monitor, WHO projects an increase in cases this year.

On May 28, UNICEF released a report detailing the most recent outbreak occurring in Sudan. Attributed to the deterioration of conditions due to the Sudanese Civil War, the outbreak is most prevalent in Khartoum State. As the conflict ravages residential areas, displacement has reached new peaks and hordes of civilians reside in overcrowded and unsanitary shelters. Attacks from armed forces have also damaged the national supplies of electricity and water, forcing families to rely on water from contaminated sources.

The report further details that the recent outbreak in Khartoum spread particularly quickly. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) recorded over 500 cases in a single day on May 21. This represents a quarter of the cases recorded in the past three weeks. UNICEF added that between May 15 and 25, the number of recorded cases surged ninefold from 90 per day to 815.

Additionally, Sudanese officials confirmed that there have been over 2,500 cases recorded in the past week, as well as 172 deaths. Since January, there have been approximately 7,700 cases of cholera recorded in Sudan and 185 associated deaths. Over 1,000 of these cases comprise of children under the age of five.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has expressed concern as the rapid rise in cases greatly outpaces Sudan's national epidemic response supplies. With Sudan lacking the adequate resources to respond to a widespread public health crisis, it is imperative that humanitarian organizations distribute vaccines and continue to monitor the spread.

"Sudan is on the brink of a full-scale public health disaster. The combination of conflict, displacement, destroyed critical infrastructure, and limited access to clean water is fueling the resurgence of cholera and other deadly diseases. With the rainy season fast approaching, the need for immediate, coordinated action could not be more urgent," said Eatizaz Yousif, IRC's Sudan Country Director.

At present, the main challenge in Sudan is in monitoring the spread of infection and supplementing the collapsing healthcare system. Dr. Sayed Mohamed Abdullah from Sudan's Doctors Union stated that roughly 80 percent of hospitals are not functional, and the remaining are operating on shortages of water, electricity, and medical supplies. These remaining facilities struggle to assist large influxes of patients on a daily basis. Humanitarian aid workers and medical personnel are also at heightened risks of exposure.

"Part of what we are doing with health authorities is to reinforce the epidemic surveillance system to have a better understanding of where most of the patients come from, what the main problems are, and how we could improve our support," said Slaymen Ammar, MSF's medical coordinator in Khartoum. "In a context like this, with very few operational health facilities, we need to quickly address the needs of patients to prevent them from progressing to a severe form of the disease."

The United Nations (UN) and its partners have been on the frontlines supporting vaccination campaigns that target the most vulnerable communities. According to UN Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Stéphane Dujarric, cholera vaccinations began on May 27 in Jabal Awliya, a village that borders Khartoum which was hit particularly hard.

That same day, WHO announced that they had delivered eight tonnes worth of medical supplies including treatments for non-communicable diseases, mental health issues, and malnutrition. This is estimated to provide roughly six months of support to the hospital.

UNICEF has delivered over 1.6 million oral cholera vaccines along with numerous cholera treatment kits. They have also distributed water treatment chemicals to households and water plants in an effort to mitigate the spread. Furthermore, UNICEF is also facilitating community awareness through social media campaigns and dialogues.

"We are racing against time with our partners to provide basic healthcare, clean water, and good nutrition, among other lifesaving services, to children who are highly vulnerable to deadly diseases and severe acute malnutrition," said Sheldon Yett, UNICEF Representative for Sudan. "Each day, more children are exposed to this double threat of cholera and malnutrition, but both are preventable and treatable, if we can reach children in time."

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