

Getting rid of cholera

A new global roadmap hopes to achieve it

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There is a long way to go before cholera is completely eradicated at a global level. Providing access to safe drinking water, improving basic sanitation facilities, access to basic medical care and implementing mass immunisation programmes are vital components to accelerate the process of making the countries cholera-free.

This is exemplified by the fact that the world's high-income countries have been cholera-free for nearly 150 years. Despite this progress, at least 47 countries still remain under the cholera threat.

With the goal of reducing cholera deaths by 90 per cent and eliminating the disease in at least 20 countries by 2030, the new Global Roadmap developed by the Global Task Force on Cholera Control (GTFCC) is a renewed approach to tackle the epidemic. It is an endeavour to get affected countries commit to an effective mechanism by supporting them through technical expertise, financial resources and operational structures by encouraging partnerships at local and global levels.

The roadmap comprises three strategic initiatives. It will focus on containing cholera outbreaks with quick detection through surveillance and enhanced laboratory capabilities which will be accompanied by immediate and effective response systems.

In addition, a multi-sectoral intervention will focus on "hot-spots" (geographies with a high incidence of cholera) to implement control measures such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and oral cholera vaccines (OCVs).

The GTFCC will also facilitate efficient coordination between countries to provide necessary technical support and resource mobilisation.

Commonly-available interven-

tions which can prevent and control cholera have largely been ineffective, driven mainly by the scarcity of basic resources. Geographical patterns of cholera outbreaks have shown that economically weaker countries are disproportionately affected.

More than two billion people in these vulnerable countries still access drinking water from contaminated sources, and over 2.4 billion people lack access to basic sanitation facilities. With rapid population growth, urbanisation, climate change and the growing scarcity of resources, the risk of cholera is expected to continue increasing. Vulnerable countries still struggle to meet their basic WASH targets, with over 80 per cent of them reporting insufficient availability of financial resources.

Areas affected by adverse events and calamities — conflict, war and



famines — are at a significantly higher risk. In Yemen, one of the world's poorest countries, cholera affected more than 1.1 million people in 2017, in what is widely regarded as the largest cholera outbreak in history. Nearly 7,000 cholera cases have been suspected in the last few months among the population displaced due to the Rohingya refugee crisis. With an estimated \$2 billion in global healthcare costs and lost productivity every year, cholera carries a significant economic burden.

Renewed strategy

With a renewed strategy, the global roadmap aims to implement a series of initiatives to address the cholera epidemic. Major initiatives include the implementation of WASH measures for the most vulnerable populations, and effective routine surveillance and enhanced laboratory capacities to confirm suspected cases and initiate immediate response systems.

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