

Title: WASH Rapid Response Team in the Cholera Outbreak in Yemen

Activities: Train rapid response team; Perform active case finding; Engage in ongoing dialogue with community; Promote good hygiene practices

Stakeholders: UN Children's Fund

Phases: Early Response; Intervention

Years: 2016 - present

Countries: Yemen

Agent: Cholera

Case study prepared by: Madison Berry, November 12, 2019

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The largest known cholera epidemic in modern history began in October 2016 in Yemen and has yet to end three years later.¹ As of September 2019, the WHO reported a suspected 2,118,387 cases of cholera in Yemen since the outbreak began. Cholera is caused by consuming water or food with the cholera bacterium in it, which is typically caused by contamination from the infected individual's feces.² The problem of accessing clean water and receiving treatment after consuming water contaminated with cholera has been exacerbated by the civil war occurring in Yemen that began in 2015.³ Water sanitation infrastructure have been destroyed by airstrikes,⁴ and approximately half of Yemen's hospital have been hit by airstrikes or shut down due to lack of personnel.⁵ These factors, as well as others such as extreme poverty and lack of medicine, have led to the rapid spread of disease through the population.⁶

¹ Epidemic and pandemic-prone diseases. World Health Organization,

<http://www.emro.who.int/pandemic-epidemic-diseases/outbreaks/index.html>

² General Information. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/cholera/general/index.html>

³ Federspiel, F., & Ali, M. (2018). The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward. *BMC public health*, 18(1), 1338. doi: [10.1186/s12889-018-6227-6](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-6227-6)

⁴ Camacho, A., Bouhenia, M., Alyusfi, R., Alkohlani, A., Naji, M. A. M., de Radiguès, X., ... & Poncin, M. (2018). Cholera epidemic in Yemen, 2016–18: an analysis of surveillance data. *The Lancet Global Health*, 6(6), e680-e690. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(18\)30230-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30230-4)

⁵ Snyder, S. (2017, May 15). Thousands in Yemen get sick in an entirely preventable cholera outbreak. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-05-15/thousands-yemen-get-sick-entirely-preventable-cholera-outbreak>.

⁶ Snyder, S. Thousands in Yemen get sick in an entirely preventable cholera outbreak.

Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) are being deployed to communities to help address the outbreak.⁷ RRTs are trained professionals who quickly and efficiently respond to global health emergencies through disease control measures in communities.⁸ UNICEF began to deploy Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) RRTs focused on containing cholera through safe water and hygiene practices in 2017, after a surge of cholera cases.⁹ UNICEF's WASH cluster has increased the prevalence of RRTs in recent years, showing just how beneficial they can be.¹⁰ By the end of 2018, UNICEF had deployed over 1,000 RRTs in Yemen spanning across 21 of the 22 cholera-affected governorates.¹¹

Much of the work WASH's RRTs in Yemen is at the community and individual level.¹² A major aspect of the RRTs was to make household visits to infected or suspected individual's homes to try and prevent the spread to other residents of the household, neighbors, or other community members.¹³

When an initial cholera case alert in a community is received by the RRT, members of the WASH RRT will arrive to begin interventions within ten days at maximum.¹⁴ Once they are in the community, after a suspected case is identified, the WASH RRT team visits the home of the individual, as well as neighboring homes, within five days of the alert, but often as early as the following day after the case is identified.¹⁵ At individual homes, WASH RRTs provide WASH kits, including items such as soap and chlorine tablets, and educational information about water sanitation and preventing cholera.¹⁶ The WASH RRTs do not just distribute these materials, but

⁷ Coping with Risks in Yemen While Providing Hope. (2019, January 15). The World Bank,

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/01/15/coping-with-risks-in-yemen-while-providing-hope>

⁸ Evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 Response to the Cholera Epidemic in Yemen: A Crisis Within a Crisis. The United Nations Children's Fund,

https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/Evaluation_of_UNICEFs_Response_to_the_Cholera_Outbreak_in_Yemen_EOHO_2018-001.pdf

⁹ Evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 Response to the Cholera Epidemic in Yemen: A Crisis Within a Crisis. The United Nations Children's Fund.

¹⁰ Annual Results Report 2017 Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. The United Nations Children's Fund,

https://www.unicef.org/publicpartnerships/files/Annual_Results_Report_2017_WASH.pdf

¹¹ Cholera rapid response teams strengthen communities' role in outbreak prevention and response. (2018, November 22). The United Nations Children's Fund,

<https://www.unicef.org/yemen/stories/cholera-rapid-response-teams-strengthen-communities-role-outbreak-prevention-and-response>

¹² UNICEF Yemen Humanitarian Situation Report. The United Nations Children's Fund,

https://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_Yemen_Humanitarian_Situation_Report_Jan_2019.pdf

¹³ Brief Report Cholera in Yemen: A Case Study of Epidemic Preparedness and Response. Johns Hopkins Center for Humanitarian Health,

http://hopkinshumanitarianhealth.org/assets/documents/CHOLERA_YEMEN_BRIEF_Low_Res_Dec_4_2018.pdf

¹⁴ UNICEF Yemen Humanitarian Situation Report. The United Nations Children's Fund.

¹⁵ Yemen Acute Watery Diarrhea and Cholera Outbreak Standard Operating Procedures – March 2018. WASH Cluster, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pfnBOiRON7wvcb5NPNdcLsP9ZwZYqpbT/view>

¹⁶ Yemen Acute Watery Diarrhea and Cholera Outbreak Standard Operating Procedures – March 2018. WASH Cluster.

they work with the households to make sure they understand how to use these items to prevent the spread.¹⁷ RRTs teach families important behaviors they can take such as proper hand washing and the use of soap.¹⁸ They also improve water sanitation in the community, through actions such as fixing broken WASH infrastructure,¹⁹ and at the household level, through techniques such as water storage.²⁰

While there originally was not a prompt and efficient enough response from multiple partners, including UNICEF, to the Yemen Cholera outbreak, the deployment of RRTs continues to be one of UNICEF's most crucial control measures.²¹ Since Yemen has extreme systemic problems that prevent upwards of 16 million people from accessing clean water,²² the work the WASH RRTs are doing is crucial to educate people on how to stay safe and reduce the spread of cholera.²³

Please include case study summary text below this line.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) provide vital interventions to potential cases of cholera in Yemen. The outbreak has been going on since 2016 and still remains a major problem in Yemen. RRTs visit the home of potentially infected individuals to promote sanitation and hygiene techniques, such as proper handwashing, to control the spread of cholera. The use of RRTs has greatly increased as the outbreak continues.

¹⁷ Rapid Response Teams reach Yemen's most remote areas to help eliminate cholera. (2019, January 31). The United Nations Children Fund, <https://www.unicef.org/yemen/stories/rapid-response-teams-reach-yemens-most-remote-areas-help-eliminate-cholera>

¹⁸ Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator Report on the Use of CERF Funds. United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund, https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/18-RR-YEM-28632-NR01_Yemen_RCHC.Report.pdf

¹⁹ Brief Report Cholera in Yemen: A Case Study of Epidemic Preparedness and Response. Johns Hopkins Center for Humanitarian Health.

²⁰ Cholera rapid response teams strengthen communities' role in outbreak prevention and response. (2018, November 22). The United Nations Children's Fund

²¹ Evaluation of the UNICEF Level 3 Response to the Cholera Epidemic in Yemen: A Crisis Within a Crisis. The United Nations Children's Fund.

²² 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview – Yemen. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Needs, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/yemen_humanitarian_needs_overview_hno_2018_20171204_0.pdf

²³ Lack of Preparedness Hampered Response to Cholera Epidemic in Yemen. (2018, December 5). Infection Control Today, <https://www.infectioncontroltoday.com/infectious-diseases-conditions/lack-preparedness-hampered-response-cholera-epidemic-yemen>