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News

Pakistan sees first suspected cases of cholera

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The first suspected cases of cholera have been reported in flood stricken Pakistan, and cases of acute diarrhoea are rife, aid agencies report.

"We have seen a lot of suspected cholera cases in more than one district," said Ahmed Mukhtar, medical coordinator for Médecins Sans Frontières in Pakistan. "It seems there is some kind of alarming trend."

Dr Mukhtar said that several cases were suspected throughout the country but that he was still awaiting laboratory confirmation from samples that had been sent for testing.

Most of the suspected cases were reported in the Swat valley in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "In the Swat [district] we saw 60 patients with acute diarrhoea who fulfilled the clinical case description of cholera," Dr Mukhtar said. "We had another 11 cases in a neighbouring area, the Malakand district, and another four suspected cases in another district, Lower Dir.

"We are following all suspected cases closely, we have started to treat them as if they are cholera cases, and we are taking extra precautions when it comes to infection control." He added that tents for these patients were being put on hospital premises away from the main hospital building.

Last week the United Nations reported that the most common diseases resulting from the flooding were scabies, respiratory tract infections, and acute diarrhoea, with thousands of cases being reported around the country.

Health facilities have been destroyed throughout the country. Over the weekend the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, visited Pakistan. He said, "I will never forget the destruction and suffering I have witnessed today. In the past I have visited the scenes of many natural disasters around the world, but nothing like this. The scale of this disaster is so large—so many people, in so many places, in so much need."

Dr Mukhtar said that several mountainous areas were still waiting for aid. "We are aware of one or two locations that have got a small quantity of aid by air lifting," he said, "but we know there are many more highland areas from which there is no news . . . It is a bit of a blind spot, and this is very worrying."

He added that he was seeing a growing number of cases of malnutrition and that children aged under 5 years

were a particular concern. Of 2000 patients seen at a Médecins Sans Frontières mobile clinic in the northernmost province of Gilgit-Baltistan, 175 children under 5 were reported as being malnourished.

“We cannot directly equate this to the floods, but those children may have been pushed over the edge by the floods and may have been compromised further,” Dr Mukhtar said.

Notes

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