

Ambitious plans to vaccinate more than a million against cholera

Phase 2 of the biggest ever oral vaccination campaign against cholera is taking place in 15 health districts in the four central provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).



Image: MSF

The second dose of vaccine confers lasting immunity against cholera and is being targeted at 1,235,972 people older than one year of age. The five-day, door-to-door campaign will involve 2,632 vaccinators recruited mainly from local communities, whose job it is to administer the oral cholera vaccine, fill in vaccination cards and tally sheets, and compile a daily summary of the teams' progress.

In parallel, 583 community mobilisers have been selected – one mobiliser for every three teams in urban areas and one mobiliser for every two teams in rural districts. Their job is to alert local people that vaccinators will visit their homes. They will use loudspeakers to spread the message, particularly in the early evening. The campaign is organised by the Ministry of Health with technical, logistic and financial support from WHO, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Global Task Force on Cholera Control (GTFCC).

The first round of vaccinations took place in late December 2018. The purpose of the vaccination campaign is to contain the serious epidemic which resulted in 9,154 presumed cases and 458 deaths (case-fatality rate of 5%) in the five affected provinces in Kasai region between January and December 2018.

This cholera vaccination campaign marks the intensification of our response in the DRC," said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO regional director for Africa, "WHO and our partners are working with national authorities to rollout the vaccine, which comes in addition to multiple interventions introduced since the beginning of the cholera epidemic, including sanitation and water quality control in the affected areas, many of which have little access to a safe water supply."

Deadly epidemics

"The DRC is currently going through an unprecedented combination of deadly epidemics, with Ebola and measles outbreaks also causing untold misery across the country. It is vital that the global effort to control these outbreaks continues to receive support: we cannot allow this needless suffering to continue," said Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi.

In 2018, the DRC reported a cumulative total of 29,304 suspected cholera cases and more than 930 deaths (case-fatality rate 3.17%). Since the start of 2019 and up to epidemiological week 23 (3-9 June), at least 12,247 suspected cases of cholera and 279 deaths (case-fatality rate 2.2%) have already been reported in 137 health districts in 20 of the 26 provinces of the DRC.

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