“IOM WORKS WITH PARTNERS TO REDUCE THE MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY OF COMMUNITIES VULNERABLE TO CHOLERA”

With limited access to basic health care and safe drinking water, Kenya has suffered several cholera outbreaks in vulnerable regions since 1971.

Cholera, an acute diarrhoeal disease that can kill within hours if left untreated, is often spread through contaminated water or food. It is a major concern for mobile populations, pastoralist communities and remote regions in Kenya which have limited health care facilities and severely lack sanitation management and awareness.

In 2009, Kenya reported 11,769 cases of cholera; the highest number in 10 years. 274 people lost their lives as a result.

In partnership with the Kenyan Government, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched an immediate response.

Rapid response teams

Four rapid response teams equipped with basic commodities including re-hydration sachets (ORS), chlorine water treatment tablets and information, education and communication materials were dispatched to the most affected communities in the Rift Valley, Western and Nyanza provinces.

CERF

Funded by the Central Emergency Relief Fund, IOM undertook sensitization sessions promoting basic hygiene.

Many at-risk communities possess limited knowledge of how to use basic commodities and manage sanitation, which is vital for mitigating cholera outbreaks.

Expanding the response

In May 2010, IOM expanded its cholera response to fully cover Turkana, a largely nomadic arid region in north Kenya with a population of just under 855,300 people. Infrastructure in Turkana remains scarce and is a major at-risk region.

In 2010 IOM conducted 1,289 health education sessions promoting cholera prevention in Turkana. Over 492,000 people benefitted

708,774 re-hydration sachets and over 1.7 million aqua tabs were disseminated in Turkana to vulnerable families in 2010

IOM’s response team treated 355 cases of cholera

IOM’s cholera response team de-wormed 477,542 people in Turkana targeting at-risk women and children

24 health facilities were re-stocked with cholera prevention kits in Turkana

From July to November 2009 IOM dispatched four rapid response teams benefitting 82,834 people in Rift Valley, Western and Nyanza provinces

IOM assisted in setting up a cholera treatment centre in Lodwar district hospital
Cementing relationships with district health management teams, community and youth leaders, counsellors and church leaders, IOM developed and distributed hygiene education materials in both English and Kiswahili. Pictorials were created to educate on basic hygiene and raise awareness on cholera. Over 1,200 educations sessions were conducted in Lodwar and Kakuma, two of Turkana’s most populated towns.

Building capacity

Numerous health care workers, including nurses and public health officers, were trained by IOM on how to manage cholera and sanitation, all of which will help stem contamination and benefit vulnerable communities long-term. IOM also assisted with the creation of cholera treatment centres and renovated the entire isolation ward at Lodwar district hospital.

Despite a successful cholera prevention campaign, several challenges still remain. Dr Donald Mogoi, Medical Officer for the Ministry of Health in Turkana, a key IOM partner, believes more needs to be done.

Cholera came because there are long term issues

Whilst “there was a marked change since IOM and the Ministry arrived, we require more. Cholera did not come because there was an emergency, cholera came because there are long term issues that need to be addressed, such as consistent water supplies, health promotion and hygiene education. This is why we require IOM” states Dr Mogoi.

“I have lived here for ten years. Last year my village had cholera, and my daughter got the disease. The problem we have is a lack of toilets, so all human waste washes into the lake. The children play and drink the water. That is how my daughter got cholera.”

Paulo Ngorok, Longech village, Lake Turkana

“We normally drink the water from the river bed, we use it for washing clothes and we use it for cooking, and washing ourselves. Not so long ago we had cholera because people do not usually wash their hands or utensils so they normally get diarrhoea. If we get the aqua tablets we will use them, if not, we will drink the water untreated.”

Beatrice, Kakuma resident

“Here in Kakuma there are low income communities. They cannot afford to buy water, even though it is only 10 Kenyan shillings for 20 litres.”

Grace Khaguli, IOM Cholera Field Coordinator for Kakuma

“IOM has really played a very important role in our community of Longech. Since they came here this year they have taught our people how to prevent cholera. Now we know how to get clean water by using aqua tablets and the wells.”

Chief Moses Lopeyok, Lake Turkana