



DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

SYRIA - Cholera Epidemic

Data

Date: June - November 1977 (FY 77)

Location: Primarily in major cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Tartous, Homs, Lattakia

No. Dead: 88

No. Affected: 2,865 cases (confirmed)

The Disaster

There have been a few scattered cases of cholera in Syria since 1969. In 1977 some cases were identified as early as June, and the government confirmed the outbreak of an epidemic toward the end of August. The Ministry of Health identified the strain of cholera involved as El Tor and reported that figs produced in Aleppo Province and sold in other parts of the country were mainly responsible for carrying the foci of infection. Syrians infected while spending vacations at Lattakia beaches probably helped to spread the infection after returning to their respective cities and villages. As a result of preventive measures the epidemic gradually subsided, and towards the end of November the country was declared to be free of cholera. The outbreak was part of a wider cholera epidemic in the Middle East.

Action Taken by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic (SARG)

The SARG considered the cholera epidemic a major threat to the country. An ad hoc cholera committee was formed to coordinate all government action, and the Minister of State for cabinet affairs was appointed chairman of the committee by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister instructed the Minister of Health to request assistance from other Arab states, friendly nations, and WHO, and sent cabinet ministers to Aleppo and Lattakia for on-the-spot coordination of the campaign. Severe control measures were announced, including closing of all pools and beaches, banning the sale of certain fresh produce by restaurants and retailers, and banning the sale of soft drinks or juices by street vendors. Garbage collection workers were given a hundred percent increase in salaries and garbage pickup was increased from once to twice a day. Chemical spraying of city streets was conducted in all major cities. Heavy fines for sanitary violations were announced. Radio, television, and newspapers daily reminded the population of health hazards, urged them to observe proper sanitary measures,

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and generally provided guidance. Special hospitals were designated for the sole treatment of cholera, and many doctors were mobilized to treat the affected. Schools were closed for about three weeks. The SARG decided to revamp garbage and disposal practices and to purchase new equipment in order to help prevent a recurrence of the epidemic. Strict control of entry into and exit from the country was imposed.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

On August 31, 1977, the Minister of Health requested U.S. assistance, specifically asking for the supply of intravenous solutions and tetracycline tablets to replace local supplies which were almost exhausted. On September 1 the U.S. Ambassador determined that U.S. disaster relief was appropriate, and it was decided to use the Ambassador's discretionary authorization to obtain the requested supplies. The following were purchased in Beirut and delivered by truck to Damascus on September 6 and 7:

5% glucose solution	4,508 cases
normal saline	4,508 cases
normal saline plus 5% glucose	4,508 cases
Ringer solution	4,508 cases
infusion sets	18,000 sets
tetracycline IV	2,000 vials

The U.S.-donated supplies were immediately distributed to hospitals in Damascus, Lattakia, and Aleppo and were totally consumed by September 28. The value of these supplies (excluding transportation, which was provided by the U.S. embassies in Beirut and Damascus) was.....\$24,657

TOTAL \$24,657

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported.

Assistance Provided by the International Community *

International Organizations

UNICEF - sent water purification equipment and a team of sanitary engineers who checked out contaminated water supplies

World Health Organization (WHO) - at the height of the outbreak, WHO sent a team of two epidemiologists from WHO headquarters plus a regional epidemiologist to determine the mode of spread, advise on measures taken, and recommend future preventive meas-

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ures; a subsequent team of two epidemiologists and a sanitary engineer was sent to conduct a general assessment of the cholera outbreak. Total value of WHO assistance was set at \$100,000

Governments

Egypt - 10,000 liters IV fluids (value unknown)

Jordan - 1,800 liters IV fluids (value unknown)

TOTAL \$100,000

* Please note: the figure for total international assistance is an approximation. In many cases the cash value of in kind aid is unavailable.