

The following are statements from the National Health Department, which were sent via WhatsApp to health journalists in the country.

Statement 1 - Two confirmed cholera cases

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Health Editors & Journalists

Issued by: Departments of Health

Date: Sunday, 05 February 2023

Statement by Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla on the detection of Cholera cases in South Africa

Pretoria: The Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla calls for vigilance as the country records two laboratory-confirmed cases of cholera imported from Malawi.

The cases are sisters who had travelled together from Johannesburg to Malawi to attend a funeral service, and returned by bus on 30 January 2023. Both patients had developed symptoms on their return to Johannesburg.

One patient presented to a local clinic and was then admitted to hospital. During the case investigation and follow-up of close contacts, the sister reported that she also developed diarrhoea whilst travelling back from Malawi but it resolved within a day and she did not seek health care.

A close contact (household family member) of one of the cases/patients was admitted to hospital on 4 February with diarrhoea and dehydration, and is considered a possible case. Laboratory test results are pending and follow-up of close contacts is ongoing.

Cholera is an acute enteric infection caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*, and the outbreaks usually occur in settings with inadequate sanitation and insufficient access to safe drinking water. Cholera typically causes acute watery diarrhoea and can affect people of all ages.

It mainly spreads through contaminated/polluted water. People can become infected directly through drinking contaminated water, or indirectly through eating contaminated food. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but can sometimes be severe and life-threatening.

Symptoms range from mild to severe and watery diarrhoea and dehydration.

The incubation period (the period from when the person ingests cholera-contaminated water/food to when they first become ill) ranges from few hours to 5 days, usually 2 to 3 days. Most persons infected with cholera will experience mild illness or not feel ill.

Although, cholera is often predictable and preventable. People are urged to ensure proper hand-hygiene which includes thorough washing of hands with water and soap before and after using the bathroom/toilet, and preparing or eating food. The use of only safe or disinfected water for preparing food, beverages and ice is recommended to prevent possible cholera transmission include.

Safe disposal of human excrement and nappies is recommended.

The department is working closely with the affected province, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases and World Health Organization to closely monitor the situation.

All people experiencing symptoms such as diarrhoea and dehydration, with or without travel history to cholera outbreak countries are urged to report at their nearest health facilities for health screening and early detection.

The World Health Organization does not recommend any travel or trade restrictions on countries based on current available information in line with the international health regulations.

The port health officials at the ports of entry (especially land and air) will remain on alert for travellers arriving from countries experiencing cholera outbreak.

South Africa is not endemic for cholera, and the last outbreak was in 2008/9 with about 12 000 cases. That resulted from an outbreak in Zimbabwe which led to surge of imported cases and subsequent local transmission in Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces through contaminated water.

For more information and media enquiries, please contact:

Mr Foster Mohale
Health Departmental Spokesperson
0724323792
Foster.mohale@health.gov.za

Mr Doctor Tshwale
Spokesperson for Health Minister
063 657 8487
Doctor.Tshwale@health.gov.za

Statement 2 - Three confirmed cases

Dear media colleagues

Please note that the country has recorded the 3rd laboratory confirmed Cholera case. The patient is a close contact (husband) to one of the first two cases announced by the Minister of Health Dr Joe Phaahla earlier this week.

He was admitted to hospital on Saturday after he exhibited symptoms of Cholera, and his test results came back positive yesterday.

This is the first secondary transmitted case. The department reminds the public about key Cholera symptoms (diarrhoea and dehydration) together with the importance of always washing hands with soap and water/sanitiser after using the bathroom/toilet and before preparing and eating food.

Regards
Foster Mohale
Spokesperson for National Health Department

3. Statement 3 - Five confirmed cases

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Health Editors & Journalists

Issued by: Departments of Health

Date: Thursday, 23 February 2023

Health Minister announces first Cholera death, as more cases detected in South Africa

Pretoria: The Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla announces the first death linked to the recent cases of cholera detected in South Africa, as the number of laboratory confirmed-cases rises to five.

This follows an announcement of three cases a few weeks ago.

The 4th case is a 28-year-old male residing in Alexandra Township with no local or international travel history.

The patient presented himself at the Edenvale Hospital Emergency Centre with a four-day history of diarrhoea, vomiting and body weakness.

A specimen was collected for testing and the patient was not admitted at the hospital but managed as an outpatient and given treatment to take home, and requested to return for his results which came back positive.

The outbreak response team conducted a case investigation visited the patient's residence and workplace the following day.

The 5th case is a 24-year-old male residing in Emandleni Wattville, Benoni in Ekurhuleni with no travel history.

The patient presented with profuse watery diarrhea and was admitted at Tambo Memorial Hospital. His results confirmed positive status and sadly he passed away few days later.

One of his contacts is still in hospital and further investigation is being conducted.

The body of the deceased will be transported to KwaZulu-Natal for burial and health officials will advise the bereaved family and undertakers of the safe burial precautions to prevent the spread of the disease.

Cholera mainly spreads through contaminated/polluted water.

People can become infected directly through drinking contaminated water, or indirectly through eating contaminated food.

Symptoms include diarrhoea dehydration, vomiting and body weakness.

Members of the public are reminded to maintain hand hygiene to prevent possible transmission.

All people who experience cholera-like symptoms, with or without local or international travel history, are encouraged immediately visit their nearest health facility for screening and testing to ensure early detection and successful treatment, if test positive.

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Doctor.Tshwale@health.gov.za

4. Statement 4 - six confirmed cases

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists

Issued by: Department of Health

Date: Thursday, 02 March 2023

Health Department confirms the sixth Cholera case

Pretoria: The Department of Health would like to confirm that the country has recorded one more laboratory-confirmed case of Cholera, and this increases the total number of cases to six (6).

The case/patient is a 19-year old female residing in **Emandleni** informal settlement in Benoni, Ekurhuleni District in Gauteng.

The patient was identified by the Outbreak Response Team during contact tracing and social mobilization activities where over 1160 people were reached.

She was one of the two people who exhibited signs and symptoms of Cholera who were referred to hospital for testing. Her test results came back positive and she was given treatment, and recovering well.

The health officials will intensify contact tracing and health education in the affected areas.

Although, there is no need for the public to panic, the department is concerned about the rising number of Cholera cases, and urges all people who experience Cholera symptoms, with or without local or international travel history, to visit their nearest health facility. Cholera is presentable and curable.

The department is yet to establish a local source of Cholera transmission in the country, but people are reminded to practice hand hygiene and avoid drinking or preparing food with untreated water from the rivers or dams.

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5. Statement 5 - 10 confirmed cases

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Health Editors & Journalists

Issued by: Departments of Health

Date: Wednesday, 29 March 2023

Health Department confirms four new cases of Cholera

Pretoria: The Department of Health confirms that four new laboratory-confirmed cases of Cholera have been detected in Gauteng, and this increases the total number of positive cases from six to ten, including one death.

Cases number seven and eight are a couple (49 year-old man and 38 year-old woman) from Diepsloot who were admitted at Helen Joseph Hospital on Tuesday, 21 March with acute watery diarrhoea and severe dehydration.

During the investigation, both the wife and husband mentioned being baptized at Juskei River with additional six people on 18 March 2023, and they experienced health complications few days later.

Case number nine is a 10-year-old girl child from Katlehong in Ekurhuleni District who presented with diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting at Mpilweni Private Hospital on 19 March 2023. She was admitted and her test results confirmed positive status.

It was established during the investigation that her mother was admitted at Thelle Mogoerane Hospital on 17 March and was treated for different health conditions, unfortunately passed away the following day.

Although, cholera was not suspected by the clinicians as a result, no stool samples were taken for processing.

It was also established that the girl and her mother were baptized with other church members at Klip River a week earlier.

Case number ten is a 50-year-old woman residing at Diepsloot.

She is the pastor who baptized the couple who tested positive from Diepsloot at Juskei River, and she also drank the same water from the river.

She was detected by the health response team during contact tracing and field investigation, having diarrhea and vomiting.

Although, she was not admitted in hospital but her stool was taken for laboratory testing and the results came back positive.

All four patients have no recent international travel history, which suggests a strong possibility of local transmission or infection.

All four patients are recovering at home and are in a stable condition.

The suspected source of local cholera infections is water from Juskei River and Kilp River.

The Environmental Health Practitioners will collect water samples from the two rivers for analysis in order to establish if indeed the water is contaminated with cholera, and the department will announce the results as soon as they are available.

The department will also intensify the refresher training amongst the clinicians about cholera, especially in the affected health districts of Gauteng.

The Health Outbreak Response Team will continue with contact tracing and social mobilisation activities in the affected communities to empower the residents with health education about the disease, prevention methods and management measures to prevent possible widespread outbreaks.

Meanwhile, the residents are urged to avoid drinking or using untreated water from flowing rivers and dams to prepare food.

All people from the affected areas and beyond, who experience cholera-like symptoms which include diarrhoea, dehydration, vomiting and body weakness are urged to visit their nearest health facilities (clinic or hospital) for screening and testing to ensure early detection and successful treatment, if test positive.

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