



Lebanon situation report #4

Wednesday 19 July 2006

Highlights

- A Joint UNICEF and WHO statement was issued today expressing concern about civilian casualties and new risks to health resulting from the escalating violence in Lebanon and Israel (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2006/s12/en/index.html>).
- In close collaboration with national health authorities and sister agencies, WHO is conducting health assessments and monitoring health threats, with a special focus on most vulnerable groups and areas.
- WHO is supporting the Lebanon Ministry of Health (MOH) in coordinating with other health partners. In close partnership with UNICEF, the MOH and WHO aim at establishing public health services for displaced populations and providing emergency supplies.

Summary

- Sporadic bombing continued throughout the night. The situation remains extremely tense in the affected areas of South Lebanon and South Beirut. As of this morning, 220 people have been killed and 650 injured, according to data received by the MOH.
- The number of displaced persons in schools has doubled to 66 500. The UN estimate for displaced population is around 500 000, likely to increase to 800 000 if military operations continue.
- Lebanon is still at UN Security Phase 3 with the possibility to be increased to Phase 4.
- Third-country nationals are being evacuated.
- The South of Lebanon is cut off from the rest of the country.

Health impact

- UNRWA notified that dialysis patients are at grave risk due to the interruption of their treatment.
- No outbreaks of communicable diseases have been reported.
- The psychological impact of the violence is serious. Affected people are witnessing the death and injury of loved ones, and the destruction of their homes and communities.
- In Beirut, all hospitals are reportedly functioning despite power cuts. However, the situation in the South is unclear although large scale destruction is a major concern for the health situation of people.
- With the number of people in shelters increasing, safe drinking water is a central health concern, followed by limited access to health care and treatment. Sufficient food and adequate shelter are also important to maintain the health status of the IDPs.
- UNRWA reports that the almost 395 000 Palestinian refugees living in camps in South Lebanon have not directly been affected by the bombing. It is reporting that there has been no change in the incidence of communicable diseases among refugees. Camps have been recently supplied with essential drugs and medical equipment, with the next deliveries due in August and September.

Health response

The WHO and partners are providing support in four areas:

1. Assessment and monitoring

- The WHO Emergency staff is coordinating closely with their UN colleagues and Lebanese health authorities.
- Preparations have begun to conduct health assessments in accordance with the security situation.
- Based on the epidemiological profile of Lebanon, a comprehensive communicable diseases risk assessment profile is being prepared by the WHO Communicable Diseases Department. It will include prioritization of interventions in the emergency phase as well as emergency surveillance and early warning guidelines.

2. Health coordination

- Taking advantage of the informal MOH-led network already in place, the WHO team in Beirut is supporting the MOH in setting up coordination mechanisms with UNICEF, other UN agencies, the Lebanese Red Cross and local and national NGOs.
- WHO is working to foster a UN common platform bringing all activities in a common framework.
- A common UN operational centre is being set up today.

3. Filling health gaps

- Distribution of chlorine and other water purification supplies continues between the MOH, WHO and UNICEF.
- WHO is working in cooperation with UNRWA and the MOH to find a quick solution to the plight of the renal patients, either evacuation or provision of appropriate medical supplies.
- Five New Emergency Health Kits (NEHKs) have been sent from Brindisi. Six MOSS-compliant vehicles have been identified and should be sent shortly.
- The Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) has mobilized more than 500 emergency rescue and first aid volunteers, as well as some 200 ambulances to evacuate and provide emergency relief to people wounded or displaced by the bombings. The nine LRC blood centres, open 24 hours a day, are supplying blood to hospitals. The LRC mobile clinics are providing care to IDPs hosted in centres and schools.
- Hospitals are functioning thanks to emergency stocks, but reports suggest that small dispensaries and clinics in the south of the country are beginning to run out of medicines.
- Reports indicate the United Arab Emirates dispatched 24 fully-equipped ambulances to Lebanon.

4. Preserving and supporting local health systems

- UNRWA informs that the health services in their Palestine refugee camps in the affected areas are operating normally and medicine shortages can be addressed internally. Water supply in El-Buss refugee camp in Tyre city will suffer from acute shortage due to the constant electricity blackouts.

Urgent needs

- Humanitarian access corridors need to be agreed upon to ensure safe passage for all medical and other humanitarian supplies.
- The Lebanese government has requested international assistance for:
 - Medicines for diarrhoea, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory agents, pain killers and medicines for chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension;
 - Other supplies (like chlorine, surgical gloves, dialysis filters, medical refrigerators);
 - Materials for shelter and construction (such as tents, blankets, and generators of 5, 10, 20, 30 KVA);
 - Fire fighting equipment (fire extinguishers, foam, fire hose and fire extinguisher vehicles).