



Lebanon situation report #5

Thursday 20 July 2006

Highlights

- The Lebanese Higher Relief Council officially requested assistance from the international community to respond swiftly and efficiently to the unfolding humanitarian crisis. The numbers of casualties and displaced persons continue to increase.
- The first formal Health Cluster meeting will take place tomorrow morning, and will be coordinated by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and WHO. Informal meetings were previously ongoing between UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs.
- The priority health issues include the provision of essential drugs, access to health care and trauma care, and distribution of chlorine tablets for safe water.
- The significant destruction of infrastructure in South Lebanon will have serious consequences for the health sector.

Summary

- Current estimates report over 280 dead, 680 wounded and over 400 000 displaced, of which 85 000 are temporarily housed in schools (approximately 103) and other public sector/communal buildings.
- OCHA estimates that 130 000 people have crossed into Syria, with an estimated 45 000 persons thought to be in need of humanitarian assistance. Improved facilitation of refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria is needed.
- UN security phase 4 is likely to be declared soon, in which case only humanitarian organizations will remain in Lebanon.
- The South of Lebanon remains inaccessible.

Health impact

- As the conflict continues, needs will increase for triage, trauma and referral care, management of chronic diseases, safe access to quality primary health care, and care for the disabled.
- Sanitary conditions are poor in most schools where displaced persons have sought shelter. Unsafe drinking water is a serious concern, and poses a number of health threats.
- Ongoing insecurity limits the transport of food supplies. According to WFP assessments, there is sufficient food available in the country for a two-month period.
- Depletion of medical supplies in health facilities remains a serious concern.

Health response

The WHO and partners are providing support in four areas:

1. Assessment and monitoring

- A joint UN assessment team has been composed and comprehensive humanitarian and health assessments are being initiated.
- WHO emergency staff continues to work in close collaboration with UN colleagues and Lebanese health authorities.

2. Health coordination

- The first Health Cluster meeting tomorrow morning will kick off the formal implementation of the Cluster approach for the health sector in Lebanon.
- A telephone conference for the global Health Cluster members is scheduled by WHO Geneva at 4.00 pm today.
- A joint UN emergency operation centre is being established in Beirut today.
- The joint Flash Appeal was drafted today, and the final version will be issued next Monday. The health component will focus on woman and child health, water and sanitation for schools, and restoration of a health referral system.

3. Filling health gaps

- Distribution of chlorine and other water purification supplies continues between the MOH, WHO and UNICEF.
- ICRC is focusing on the evacuation of wounded and of migrant workers, primarily from the southern region.
- The Syrian Red Crescent, in close collaboration with the Syrian Ministry of Health, is assisting Lebanese evacuees crossing the borders.
- Additional WHO emergency/logistics staff are arriving Damascus today to strengthen the Syria office and to support the Lebanon operations.
- WHO staff are working with UN colleagues to establish logistics support in support of national authorities.

4. Preserving and supporting local health systems

- The MOH, WHO and ICRC are discussing the establishment of provisional referral systems and ways to ensure availability of essential drugs, and of health care for trauma, injuries, chronic conditions and the disabled.

Urgent needs

- Establishment of a health services referral system focusing on areas where health services are inaccessible, such as in south Lebanon.
- Sufficient safe drinking water and proper hygiene and sanitation for the rapidly increasing number of displaced in temporary shelters.