

# HEALTH BRIEF

8 - 28 March 2023

## Health Updates 28 March 2023

### COVID-19 updates



New cases

**2 092**

Cumulative cases

**1 234 494**



New deaths

**28**

Cumulative deaths

**10 865**

### CHOLERA updates



New cases

**0**

Cumulative cases

**7 149**

New deaths

**0**

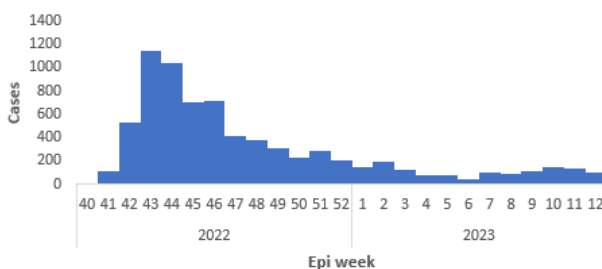
Cumulative deaths

**23**

## Epidemiology situation - Based on MOPH data

### A. Public Health Emergencies of International Concern

Weekly Cholera case distribution by Epi-Week, Lebanon  
(Source: MoPH)



Distribution of confirmed Cholera cases by date

Figure 1: Distribution of suspected and confirmed cholera cases since the start of the outbreak

### Cholera updates

- The multi-region cholera event was graded at the global level as grade 3, the highest possible graded emergency and the first cholera outbreak to be graded at level 3.
- In the last few years, the number of cholera outbreaks and affected people have significantly increased globally, and most of the countries affected by cholera are those experiencing complex emergencies, sociopolitical crises, climate and environmental challenges and other key determinants. As a result of these cholera outbreaks, more cholera cases and associated deaths were recorded. Globally, the average CFR in 2022 was 1.9% (2.9% in Africa), the highest of the past decade and a significant increase from the acceptable average (<1%).
- In 2022, Lebanon is one of the countries that has experienced a cholera outbreak and, prior to this, the last cholera case in Lebanon was reported in 1993.
- Since the start of this outbreak, a total of 7,161 suspected cases and 671 laboratory-confirmed cases with 23 associated deaths, (CFR 0.32%) were recorded across the country. During this reporting period, a total of 417 new suspected cholera cases were recorded and investigated. Nonetheless, there was no laboratory-confirmed cholera case since January 5th, 2023, while the last cholera-associated death was

registered on December 5th, 2022.

- The most affected age group has been children less than 15 years of age, but adults are also affected.
- The early warning surveillance has been intensified in the last 2 months for timely detection and confirmation of any suspected cholera cases. The MoPH has been leveraging the support of both the trained RRTs and the capacitated central and peripheral laboratories to intensify investigation and confirmatory testing for suspected cholera cases.
- On a weekly basis, there are around 100 investigation missions per week in the hotspot areas of Akkar, North, Bekaa, and Baalbek Hermel with RDT positivity dropping close to 0% and none of the specimens selected for culture returning positive results.
- Nationally, over 80% of cholera cases have not required hospitalization, and these cases were managed at outpatient clinics or home. Cholera hospitalization in major referral hospitals peaked at more than 220 inpatients per day on epi week 42 (October 17) but has continued to drop since then with almost no daily hospitalizations since the start of 2023.
- Lebanon deployed Oral Cholera Vaccines through door-to-door campaigns starting November 17 (epi week 46), 2022. To date, over 1,151,800 people received one dose of cholera vaccine across all high-risk and priority areas. The MoPH and partners have currently stopped the OCV campaign with around 350,000 doses remaining in stock.
- Cholera remains a significant public health concern in Lebanon and MOPH and partners continued to scale up the preparedness and response capacities as the risk of another cholera outbreak is high.

### COVID-19

- Globally, nearly 3.6 million new cases and over 25,000 deaths were reported during the last month, representing a decrease of 27% in incidence and 39% in mortality as compared to the previous month. Overall, over 761 million confirmed cases and over 6.8 million deaths have been reported globally since the start of the pandemic.

**COVID-19** *continued*

- Globally, recombinant Omicron variants XBB.1.5 accounts for 45.1% of cases in the 10th epidemiological week and has so far been detected in 90 countries.
- The current Variants Under Monitoring (VUMs) are BQ.1, BA.2.75, CH.1.1, XBB, XBF and XBB.1.16.
- In Lebanon, a total of 2,092 new COVID-19 cases and 28 associated deaths were reported during this reporting period. The highest COVID-19 incidence was reported from Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Over the past week, there has been 1 new death and the case fatality ratio stands at 0.88.
- In total, Lebanon has registered a total of 1,234,494 COVID-19 cases and 10,865 deaths since the start of the pandemic.
- On daily average for the past week, 8% of the ICU beds are occupied for COVID-19 patients.
- WHO is providing technical and financial support for the execution of the 4th round of the national seroepidemiological investigation protocol for COVID-19 infection.
- WHO continues to support Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) sequencing for COVID-19 at national level through the Center for Infectious Disease Research at AUB
- MOPH procured and deployed the next generation COVID-19 vaccines, which are available in most of the vaccination centers.
- At national level, COVID-19 vaccine coverage is 50.4% for the first dose, 44.4% for the second dose, and 27.6% for the third dose.

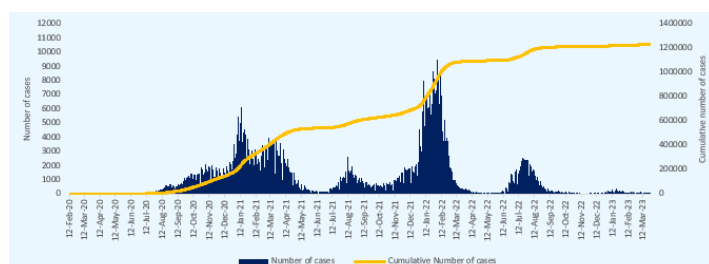


Figure 2: COVID-19 epi curve in Lebanon

**Monkeypox**

- Globally, there are 86,724 confirmed mpox cases, 112 associated deaths, and 110 countries reporting cases. In the EMR, there are so far 83 confirmed cases and 1 death.
- WHO has declared that the Public Health Emergency of International Concern for mpox remains in effect. Although many countries have effectively curbed their outbreaks, the risk continues to be high in the Americas, and particularly Central America. Overall, over 30 countries continued to report cases in the last month.
- In this global outbreak, the group primarily affected has been Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and WHO continues to support improved awareness and behaviors for risk reduction. In the African setting, transmission is occurring sexually (West Africa) but also through animal to human transmission (Central Africa).
- Since the first case was detected on the 14th of June 2022, the MoPH in Lebanon has detected and reported 27 labora-

tory-confirmed cases of mpox. During the current reporting period, one new mpox case was detected and reported among a man of unknown sexual orientation and travel history.

- Among these cases, 59% were between 25 and 34 years old, 19% were between 35 and 44 years old, 15% were equal or greater than 45 years old. One 8-year-old female has also tested positive.
- The majority of cases were reported among males with only 2 cases among females.
- Overall, 60% of cases identified as Men who have Sex with Men (MSM).
- WHO, with the support of USAID, has engaged with 6 local thematic NGOs that will integrate HIV and mpox activities among MSM in Lebanon in order to strengthen early detection and prevention of mpox transmission at national level.
- WHO continued to extend technical and financial support to the national reference laboratory at RHUH with essential human resources, laboratory reagents and testing kits (targeted and commercial) for the mpox response.
- WHO will continue to support capacity building for community organization and identification of key contextual preventive messages through a series of upcoming scheduled trainings.

**B. Seasonal flu**

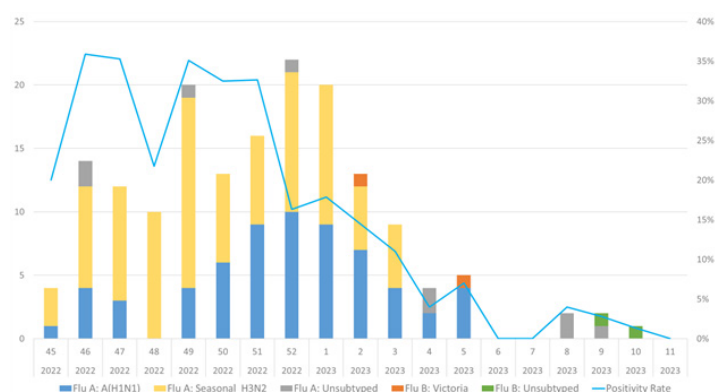


Figure 3: Number of specimens tested by influenza virus subtypes/lineages and percentage of specimens testing positive for influenza viruses in Lebanon from SARI/ILI sites (week 45, 2022 - week 11, 2023)

- From epi week 06 to 08 2023, the influenza sentinel network enrolled a total of 127 patients, out of which 125 were tested for both influenza and SARS-CoV-2. Of these tested specimens, 2 specimens were positive for influenza and 18 were positive for SARS-CoV-2.
- The influenza percent positivity has been steadily decreasing from 35% in week 49 2022 to 14% in week 02 2023, 11% in week 03 2023, and 4% in week 04 2023. The positivity rate is at 4% in week 8.
- WHO continues, through the PIP framework and the CDC influenza division, to support sentinel influenza surveillance sites through trainings, procurement of sample collection kits, and transportation of specimens.
- Lebanon has received support from Partnership for Influenza Vaccine (PIVI) under the Task Force for Global Health and will be receiving for a period of 3 to 5 years seasonal influenza vaccine doses along with necessary technical support to ensure system strengthening and a proper exit strategy.
- With the support of WHO and CDC, the MoPH was able to strengthen respiratory disease surveillance by re-activating

SARI sentinel surveillance sites. Currently, there are 19 functional sentinel sites across the country: 13 Influenza-like Illness (ILI) and 6 Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI) sentinel sites which operate as per national guidelines by enrolling suspected cases and collecting specimens and sending them to the National Influenza Center (NIC) for laboratory testing.

- WHO will continue to support the MoPH in strengthening monitoring mechanisms of other respiratory diseases of epidemic and pandemic potential, starting with RSV among children under 5 years of age.

### C. Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

Vaccine preventable diseases remain a priority by the MoPH and WHO to ensure high coverage and completeness of routine immunizations, according to the national calendar for all children under 5 to avoid any potential outbreak of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

- The SAGE meeting of 20-22 March highlighted routine immunization strengthening and the zero-dose children agenda as priority areas for the next 3 years. In order to get back on the trajectory for achieving Immunization Agenda 2030 goals and targets, the desired approach is to provide catch-up vaccination to children who missed scheduled doses, restore coverage, and strengthen immunization programs.

### Measles

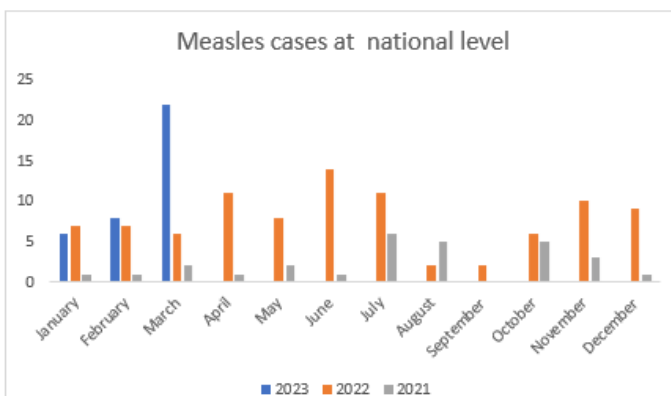


Figure 4: Number of suspected measles cases by month for past 3 years

- 21 new suspected measles cases were reported during this reporting period
- Since the start of 2023, 36 suspected measles cases were reported across the country. Of these cases, 12 were laboratory-confirmed. Of these cases, 42% were from Mount Lebanon, 17% from Nabatieh, 8.3% from Beqaa, 8.3% from Beirut, and 3% from Akkar.
- Overall, 39% of cases were between 1-4 years of age, 13.9% less than one, 16.7% between 5-9 years of age, 8.3% above 25 years of age, and 11.1% between 10-14 years of age.
- Overall, 72.2% of measles cases were zero dose individuals, i.e had not taken a single dose of measles-containing vaccines throughout their life course.

### AFP surveillance and poliovirus circulation

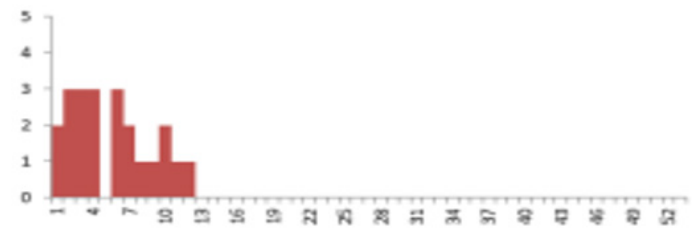


Figure 5: AFP cases by epidemiological week of onset

- During this reporting period, 7 new AFP cases were detected and reported
- Since the start of 2023, the national surveillance system was able to detect 22 AFP cases, only one case of which was a zero dose cases, i.e case who had not taken any dose of polio-containing vaccine. These cases were distributed to Mount Lebanon (5), the North (3), Bekaa (3), Nabatieh (5), South (1), Akkar (2), and Baalbeck Hermel (3).
- The nationality of these reported cases were 64% Lebanese, 32% Syrian, and 4% Palestinian.
- WHO continues to support the MoPH with human resources for active AFP surveillance and transportation of specimens (AFP and ES) in all governorates of the country through 8 nurses and 8 drivers.
- Although Lebanon has not detected and reported cVDPV2, it has been classified as a high-risk country for cVDPV2 introduction and has completed 11 out of 16 preparedness components. The pending items are related to safety monitoring and will be completed in the next few weeks.
- WHO continues to provide technical support to update the national immunization calendar with the recent SAGE recommendations stressing on the importance of additional IPV campaigns in areas at high risk or with persistent of poliovirus circulation.

### D. Other communicable diseases

#### Meningitis

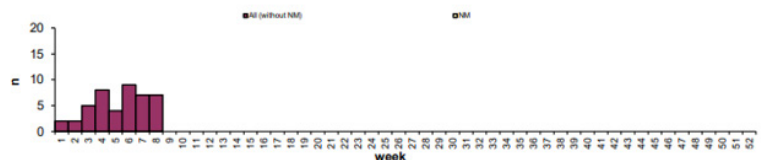


Figure 6: Meningitis cases over time

- During this reporting period, 23 new cases of meningitis were reported with no associated death.
- Since the start of 2023, there were 67 reported cases of meningitis based on clinical presentation, and the most affected governorates based on incidence per 100,000 are Beirut and South. These cases were distributed in Mount Lebanon (24%), South (19.4%), Beqaa (17.9%), Beirut (14.9%), North (14.9%), Nabatieh (7.4%), and the rest unspecified.
- Upon further specimen testing (CSF and serum), 28 of these cases were classified as bacterial infection. Culture results showed 3 cases of *S. pneumoniae*, 2 *H. influenzae*, and 1 *N. meningitidis*.

## WHO response

### WHO Lebanon supports MOPH in developing clinical algorithms



WHO supported the MOPH in developing clinical algorithms of care for the most common health conditions encountered at primary health care, with the financial support of the European Union. Different scientific societies gathered to discuss and review these algorithms, after which WHO will roll out training for PHC physicians in order to improve quality of care.

### WHO conducts a water quality training for water surveyors



WHO HQ in close collaboration with WHO Country office conducted a training on water quality testing for surveyors of around 30 participants, from 5 to 15 March as part of the 2023 National WASH Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) which is funded by UNICEF and implemented by the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS).

As part of WHO's mandate for the monitoring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 6.1 on safe drinking water for all, WHO in partnership with UNICEF supported the National Water Quality Survey of Lebanon in 2016. This would allow us to reflect on the situation of the water quality in the country and to assess the safely managed drinking water supply and related indicators. The implementation of the survey will start after Ramadhan and a refresher course will be conducted before the start of this water quality survey.

WHO is providing technical support in the implementation of the WASH water quality survey by reviewing the survey tool and methodology, undertaking the needed training, ensuring proper implementation of the survey, data analysis and recommendations.

### WHO technical nutrition team meets RHUH for malnutrition management capacity



WHO technical nutrition experts continue their visits to Rafik Hariri University Hospital to look into the inpatient management of malnutrition for children and to understand the capacity of the hospital and health care providers in malnutrition management. WHO is working on strengthening the health system while ensuring that nutrition services are available for all.

### WHO trains MOPH Medical Prevention unit on Logistics Management System software



WHO Lebanon carried out a training for capacity building of the staff of the rapid response teams all over Lebanon (RRT) for early detection and surveillance of cholera cases on the 3rd and 4th of March at the Ministry of Public Health.

The two-day training covered, case definition and surveillance, the role of the staff on the field, the field mission, how to report back on data, how to line list and investigate a case, how to perform a rapid test, and how to report back on results. For day one theories and guidelines were discussed however, day two of the training focused on practical application of how to properly wear personal protective equipment (PPE), and how to perform the rapid test, and this was applied at the WHO country office Training center.

## WHO response

### WHO nutrition experts visit Primary Healthcare Centers to check on nutrition services



WHO Regional Nutrition Adviser Dr Ayoub Al Jawaldeh and technical nutrition experts visited primary healthcare centres to look at the integration of nutrition services. The team met with physicians and nurses trained on malnutrition management and infant and young child feeding and discussed the challenges and priorities to provide appropriate nutrition services for children amid the multiple crises in Lebanon.

### WHO Lebanon team on a 2-day retreat to discuss progress and future



WHO Lebanon country office team had a 2-day retreat last Friday and Saturday to discuss progress and plan for the future, as well as how to strengthen the team.

### WHO aims for elimination of trans fatty acids in foods



The national legislation for trans fatty acids elimination is the first step to accelerating progress towards the complete trans fatty acid elimination in foods in Lebanon. WHO is working with multiple stakeholders including governments, academia and civil society for healthier food systems.

## NAP holds meeting for HIV National Strategic Plan validation



The National AIDS Program organized on March 8, a stakeholders' consensus meeting for validation of the first draft of the 2022-2027 HIV National Strategic Plan supported by WHO, the GFTAM, and IOM.

Partners from the civil society represented by thematic NGOs, and medical societies as well as representatives from ministries, armed forces, UN agencies, and the private sectors attended and actively participated in the meeting. This first draft will be revised and audited by WHO and MOPH for final endorsement. The HIV NSP goals for Lebanon for 2027 tackle three major pillars in Prevention, HIV-related deaths as well as testing and treatment. They are structured in eight Strategic Directions with SMART objectives and detailed related activities for each strategic direction.

### Trans fatty acids is key in the fight against noncommunicable diseases



The intake of trans fatty acids in Lebanon was found to be at least double WHO recommendations of 1% of total energy intake. Eliminating trans fats from foods is key in the fight against noncommunicable diseases and in protecting health and saving lives, particularly during the multiple crises #Lebanon is going through.

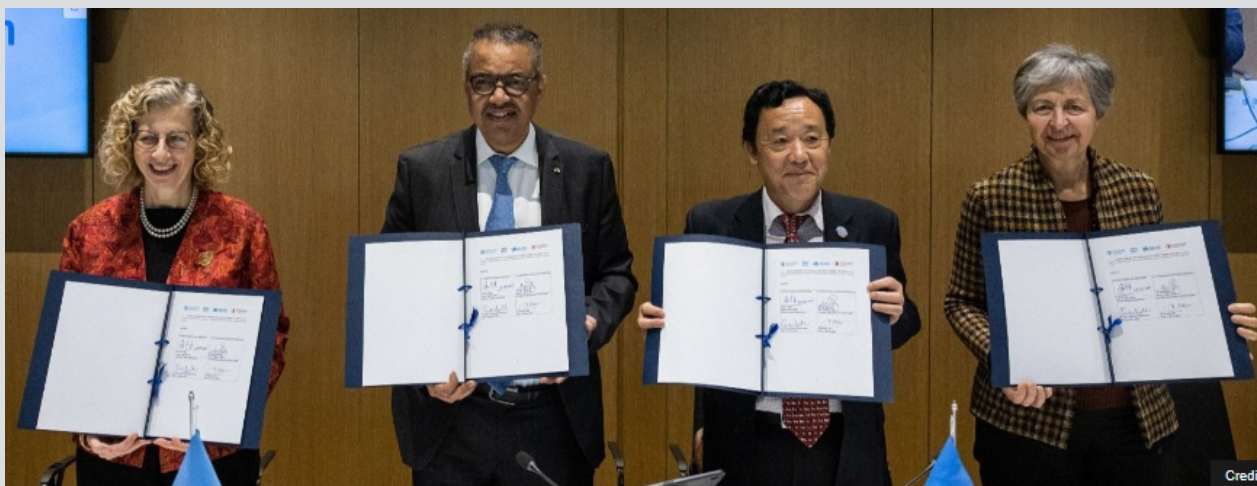
### WHO launches national legislation for trans fatty acids elimination in foods in Lebanon

The Ministry of Economy and Trade in coordination with the MOPH and support from WHO Lebanon launched the national legislation for trans fatty acids elimination in foods in Lebanon with a plan for progressive implementation. The event featured a technical discussion with key ministries as well as a presentation by the WHO Regional Nutrition Adviser Dr Ayoub Al Jawaldeh on WHO's initiatives to accelerate the achievement of trans fatty acids elimination.



## WHO Global response

### Quadripartite call to action for One Health for a safer world



Recent international health emergencies such as COVID-19 pandemic, mpox, Ebola outbreaks, and continued threats of other zoonotic diseases, food safety, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) challenges, as well as ecosystem degradation and climate change clearly demonstrate the need for resilient health systems and accelerated global action. One Health is seen as the main approach for tackling these pressing and complex challenges facing our society.

At their first annual face-to-face meeting today, the heads of the Quadripartite organizations working on One Health issued an unprecedented call for enhanced global action.

The Quadripartite aims to achieve together what no one sector can achieve alone, and it consists of four main agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

#### Call to action

Stressing the need for enhanced collaboration and commitment to translate the One Health approach into policy action in all countries, the Quadripartite leaders urge all countries and key stakeholders to promote and undertake the following priority actions:

Prioritize One Health in the international political agenda, increase understanding and advocate for the adoption and promotion of the enhanced intersectoral health governance. The One Health approach should notably serve as a guiding principle in global mechanisms; including in the new pandemic instrument and the pandemic fund to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. [Read full article.](#)

**WHO Lebanon would like to thank the support of all partners and donors who have and are still contributing generously and directly to the WHO health response. Together health for all by all.**



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