

HEALTH BRIEF

4 - 18 January 2024

COVID-19 Updates during the reporting period



New cases

441

Cumulative cases

1 249 866



New deaths

4

Cumulative deaths

10 988

Epidemiology situation - Based on MOPH data

A. Tension in South Lebanon

- Ongoing clashes continue to escalate along the Lebanon-Israel border with increased targeted attacks in the southern Lebanon. This has led to:
 - 650 persons were wounded and 148 killed within or outside of referral hospitals as of 18 January 2024, as reported by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).
 - 83,117 individuals becoming internally displaced as of 16 January 2024 (IOM). Of these, 1,120 (1.35%) are staying in 14 collective shelters and others have made their own accommodation arrangements.
- WHO has been working with the MoPH and partners to scale up the preparedness and response capacities to the ongoing emergencies, and some of the key achievements are as follow:
 - Continued to support the operationalization of the Public Health Emergency Operation Centers (PHEOC) to coordinate and support preparedness and response activities.
 - Maintained a strong health sector coordination mechanism at national and subnational levels to ensure that all health service gaps are addressed by health sector partners in a coordinated manner. Facilitated a new phase of assessment covering public and private hospitals in Zahle and Aley, which will serve as a backup for frontline hospitals in case of an escalation.
 - Facilitated the rapid hospital assessment of different hospitals as part of hospital preparedness and readiness. In total, 48 hospitals in different zones were assessed on-site by the PHEOC hospital task force, while 52 hospitals have self-completed the hospital readiness assessment. 8 hospitals have been identified as frontline referral hospitals. The rapid hospital assessment is still ongoing in the private and public hospitals in Zahle, Aley and Beirut, which will serve as a backup for frontline hospitals in case of an escalation.
 - Supported a series of capacity-building training in mass casualty management, clinical trauma care, and management of psychiatric emergencies and basic psychosocial support.
- Over 3,092 health workers in 125 hospitals have already received training on the clinical care of trauma patients. In addition, 40 hospitals have been covered by the mass casualty management training, and 2 hospitals have been covered by the management of psychiatric emergencies and basic psychosocial support training.
- Procurement and prepositioning of emergency medical supplies for trauma and surgery to referral hospitals, and other supplies to the MOPH central drug warehouse.
- Continued to strengthen the early warning surveillance system for timely detection, confirmation and response to potential outbreaks of epidemic-prone diseases.
- Supported the improvement of basic essential health services through PHCCs to ensure the continuity of primary health care services and expand the services to newly displaced population.

B. Acute Respiratory Infections

1- COVID-19

- COVID-19 is still a public health threat that needs to be monitored and addressed, even though it is no longer classified as a public health emergency.
- Globally, the number of new cases increased by 4% during the 28-day period of 11 December 2023 to 7 January 2024 as compared to the previous 28-day period, with over 1.1 million new cases. The number of new deaths decreased by 26% as compared to the previous 28-day period, with 8,700 new fatalities reported.
- As of 7 January 2024, over 774 million confirmed cases and over seven million deaths have been reported globally.
- In Lebanon, a total of 441 new COVID-19 cases with 4 associated deaths were reported during this reporting period. The severity, hospitalization, and deaths due to COVID

B. Acute Respiratory Infections *continued*

1- COVID-19 *continued*

remain low. The positivity rate was 6.4%. The case fatality ratio stands at 0.88. In the past two weeks, the ICU COVID-19 occupancy rate at referral hospitals was 4%.

- As of 10 January 2024, Lebanon has registered a total of 1,249,866 COVID-19 cases and 10,988 deaths since the start of the pandemic.
- At the national level, COVID-19 vaccine coverage remains at 50.4% for the first dose, 44.4% for the second dose, and 27.6% for the third dose.
- WHO continued to support ESU to maintain a strong surveillance system to detect cases and monitor COVID-19 hospitalization and deaths.
- WHO continued to support the Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) for SARS-CoV-2 at the national level through the Center for Infectious Disease Research at AUB. Genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in Lebanon was conducted among healthcare workers and hospitalized patients testing positive for COVID-19 from 10 hospitals. Between January and December 2023, genomic sequencing was performed on a total of 217 samples, of which results were successful for 122 samples. The results show a plethora of circulating sublineages among sequenced samples:
 - In the first quarter of the year, a diverse landscape of sublineages was observed, featuring variants like CL.1, BQ.1.1, BN.1, and BA.2.
 - In the second quarter of the year, a clear shift was observed with a predominance of XBB Omicron sublineages namely XBB.1.5 and XBB.1-like lineages.
 - In the third quarter of the year, a notable surge and predominance was observed in the XBB variant and its sub-lineages mainly the XBB.1.42.1 sub-lineage, which is in agreement with global data. A clustering of the EG.5.1.4 sub-lineage was highlighted in August which is known to be the most common lineage globally within the XBB.1.5-like variants carrying the F456L mutation.

2- Integration of seasonal influenza and other respiratory disease surveillance

- WHO continued to support the MoPH to strengthen seasonal influenza preparedness and response capacities at national and subnational levels. These supports are currently included:
 - Improvement of data processes, interoperability, and data flow through building capacities to use R software.
 - Initiating procurement of essential test kits and other reagents for typing and subtyping.
 - Field visits to SARI/ILI sentinel sites to monitor the influenza surveillance program and propose corrective measures to improve specimens' collection.
 - Documenting successes and lessons learned from the SARI sentinel sites reactivation in the 2022/23 season.
 - Training of the NIC and ESU teams to ensure synchro-

nization and flow of virologic information and data from the National Influenza Center (NIC) to regional and global reporting platforms (EMFLU, FluID, and FluNet).

- Continuous engagement and training with sentinel site staff and diagnosing physicians.
- Analysis of weekly data and dissemination of information through regular influenza situation reports.
- With the support of WHO, the MoPH continued to monitor the circulation of seasonal influenza viruses. During this reporting period, 249 specimens have been collected from ILI/SARI sentinel sites. Based on data obtained from the National Influenza Centre (NIC), for Epi-weeks 1 and 2, a total of 255 patients were enrolled through the ILI/SARI sentinel network and specimens were collected. All specimens were sent to the NIC for testing of influenza and SARS-CoV-2, while specimens among children were tested for RSV as well. The results were available for the 255 specimens collected (166 specimens from ILI sites and 89 specimens from SARI sites). 86 specimens were positive for seasonal influenza virus, with influenza A(H1N1) being the most predominant influenza subtype, while 3 specimens were positive for SARS-CoV-2 virus. A co-circulation of SARS-CoV-2 and influenza A(H1N1) was reported in one case. The majority of positive influenza cases were observed in the 16 to 50 years age group (30%), 0 to 5 years age group (29%), followed by the 6 to 15 years age group (21%). No positive RSV cases were detected.
- Ahead of the 2023/24 influenza season, the MoPH in Lebanon received 10,000 doses of seasonal influenza vaccine from the Partnership for Influenza Vaccine Introduction (PIVI) under the Task Force of Global Health (TGH). The vaccination campaign that started in October is still in progress targeting high risk groups including health workers, elder people and people with co-morbidities. Most vaccine doses were distributed across different vaccination sites including:
 - Primary Health Care Centers (PHCCs) - targeting 3,403 healthcare workers.
 - Elderly homes – targeting 1,920 healthcare workers and elderly people.
 - Public hospitals – targeting 1,123 healthcare workers.
 - Children with chronic conditions receive care at university medical centers.
 - Dialysis centers – targeting 445 dialysis patients.
 - Karageuzian and Dar El Hawraa PHCs – targeting elderly patients with chronic conditions.

C. Food and Waterborne Diseases

- In view of recent displacement and population movement in the south, WHO together with MoPH in Lebanon has been strengthening water-borne disease surveillance for timely detection and confirmation of potential cholera or other water-borne pathogens. There are ongoing efforts to strengthen sentinel sites to monitor AWD and other water-borne diseases. Upcoming work will include training of personnel and initiation of specimen enrollment mechanisms.

1- Cholera/Acute Watery Diarrhea

- WHO and the MoPH are constantly monitoring AWD cases with high vigilance, and there are no reported suspected or confirmed cholera cases during this reporting period. MoPH together with WHO are scaling up the cholera preparedness and response capacities, while leveraging and sustaining the gains made during the cholera outbreak.
- Active early warning surveillance is also ongoing through existing EWARS reporting sites and field missions of trained RRTs to areas with reported AWDs and transportation of specimens to the capacitated central and peripheral laboratories for investigation and confirmatory testing. With the support of WHO, the MoPH in Lebanon has created a sentinel surveillance network to help monitor and test AWD cases and identify the circulating pathogens of concern.
- Cholera remains a significant public health concern in Lebanon and MOPH and partners will continue to sustain effective preparedness and response capacities as the risk of another cholera outbreak is high.

2- Hepatitis A

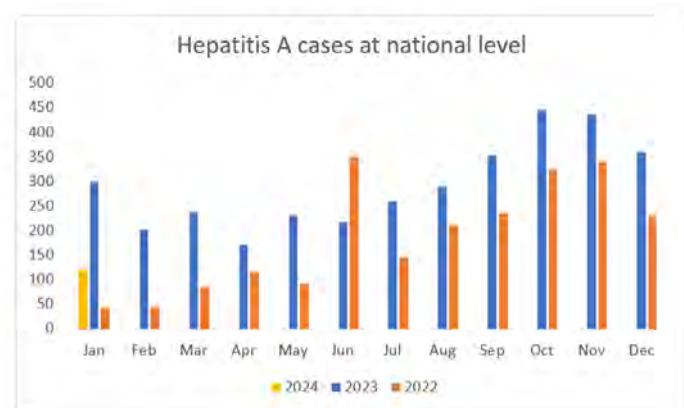


Figure 1: Number of suspected Hepatitis A cases by month for past 3 years

- During this reporting period, a total of 121 new suspected hepatitis A cases were reported across the country.
- There are no active clusters of hepatitis A cases among displaced populations.
- Since the start of 2024, a total of 121 suspected Hepatitis A cases have been reported from health facilities across the country, of which 28.1% have been reported among three age groups: 5-9 years old, 10-19 years old, and 20-39 years old.
- Suspected Hepatitis A cases were distributed in North (68), Beqaa (23), Mount Lebanon (18), South (8), and Nabatieh (4).
- The MoPH surveillance team continued to monitor the epidemiological situation of food and waterborne diseases at public and private facilities across the country.
- Coordination is ongoing between the surveillance and WASH sectors to ensure suspected cases of water-borne diseases are detected and appropriate WASH interventions are implemented.
- MoPH is collaborating with other lines ministries to enhance the water and sanitation conditions in high-risk areas, including awareness raising campaign and promoting chlorination.

D. 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 (VPDs).
- WHO is also supporting the strengthening of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) for better definition of roles and responsibilities and improved access to tools and resources for evidence generation and translation into recommendations.
- The first National Certification Committee (NCC) meeting of 2024 was held in the third week of January. Discussions focused on the polio-free status of Lebanon in light of recent epidemiological data from neighboring countries and the increasing risk of polio introduction, notably circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2). A national action plan for 2024 was presented by the NCC Chair, including the execution of a polio outbreak simulation exercise as part of the outbreak response preparedness.

1- Measles

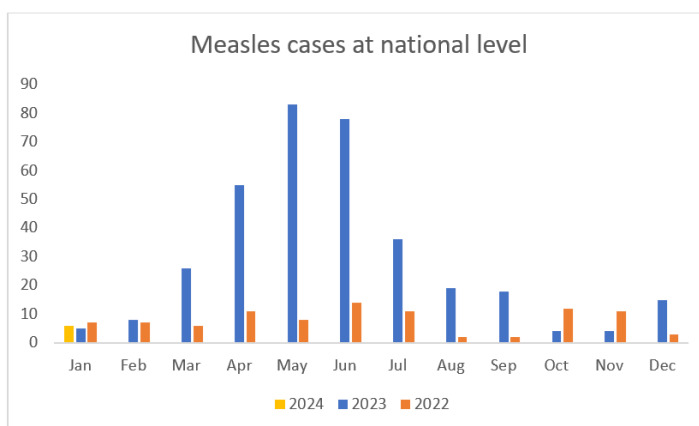


Figure 2: Number of suspected measles cases by month for past 3 years

- During this reporting period, a total of 6 new suspected measles cases were reported from Bekaa (1), South (2), Nabatieh (2), and North (1), affecting various age groups.
- There are no active clusters of measles cases among displaced populations.
- The MoPH surveillance team conducts periodic series of field investigations for the reported suspected cases, and blood samples are collected and sent to the central laboratory for confirmation.
- Since the start of 2024, a total of 6 suspected measles cases have been reported at the national level. Of these, 3 suspected cases were investigated, with no lab-confirmed cases.
- Further analysis of the available data indicated that the 0 - 4 age group has the highest attack rate, followed by the 5-9 age group.
- Overall, 67% of measles cases reported were zero-dose children, which means those children had not taken a single dose of measles-containing vaccines throughout their life course.
- WHO supported the MoPH in conducting a measles risk assessment where out of 26 districts in total, 15 were found to be at very high risk, 5 at high risk, another 5

EPI situation *continued*

at medium risk, and 1 at low risk for measles outbreak. WHO will continue supporting the MoPH to enhance the surveillance and disease outbreak investigation and response as part of the overall emergency preparedness and response measures.

- In efforts to improve early detection and reporting, WHO supported the MoPH in conducting 25 training sessions targeting 919 health workers across all central and peripheral hospitals and medical centers in the country to improve the use of measles case definition and reporting up to central level.

2- Poliovirus

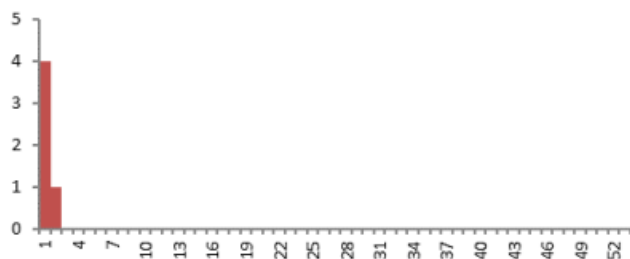


Figure 3: AFP cases by epidemiological week of onset

- During the past 2 weeks, 5 new suspected AFP cases were detected through active case finding and reported for further investigation. These new cases were identified in North (1), Akkar (1), South (2) and Mount Lebanon (1).
- Since the start of 2024, the national surveillance system was able to detect 5 suspected AFP cases. Among these cases, 1 case was zero dose, i.e. case who had not taken any dose of polio-containing vaccine.
- The nationality of these reported AFP cases was 80% Lebanese and 20% Syrian.
- WHO continued 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.
- Lebanon is now fully verified to deploy nOPV2 in case of cVDPV2 detection.
- 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.

E. Other Communicable Diseases

1- Monkeypox

- While Mpox no longer constitutes a global public health emergency, it continues to pose a significant threat to the health of individuals and high-risk populations.
- WHO continued to support the MoPH in Lebanon in optimizing available resources to sustain the gains and leveraging the Mpox response for broader preventive sexual health programming.
- Globally, there are 92,783 confirmed Mpox cases, and 171 associated deaths, from 116 countries reporting cases. In the EMR, there are so far 95 confirmed cases and 1 death (As of 30 November 2023).

- There is no new global data available during this reporting period due to the delay in reporting.
- 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 through National Authorities and local organizations. 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 laboratory-confirmed cases of Mpox. During the current reporting period, no new Mpox cases were detected.
- Among these cases, 59% were between 25 and 34 years age group, 19% were between 35 and 44 years age group, 15% were equal or greater than 45 years. One 8-year-old female has also tested positive.
- Most 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 are integrating HIV and Mpox activities among MSM in Lebanon to strengthen early detection and prevention of Mpox transmission at the 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.

2- Meningitis

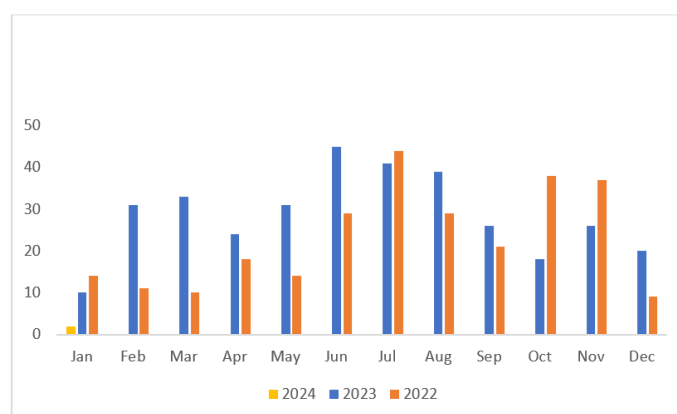


Figure 4: Number of suspected meningitis cases by month for past 3 years

- During this reporting period, 2 new suspected cases of meningitis were reported, aged 20-39 years (1 case) and unknown age (1 case).
- Since the start of 2024, a total of 2 suspected meningitis cases were reported across the country.
- These suspected meningitis cases were distributed in Mount Lebanon (1) and Beirut (1).

WHO response

WHO conducts gender mainstreaming in emergencies trainings



WHO remained committed to advocating and supporting gender mainstreaming in emergency preparedness and response. A series of trainings conducted in the last two months targeting 104 staff from WHO, MoPH and other partners. The objective was to sensitize staff on gender equality concepts and tools in the context of humanitarian response and ways to integrate gender in humanitarian programming. This initiative underscores our collective commitment to fostering a more inclusive and responsive approach in addressing emergencies.

WHO and MOPH conduct capacity training on the People-Centered Primary Care approach



During the closure event on integrating the People-Centered Primary Care approach in primary health care centres in Lebanon that WHO implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, Primary Health Care Department and with the support of the European Union. The pilot phase was implemented in 5 PHC centres, where WHO introduced this approach with a 16-week learning program that includes training, coaching, self-paced work, and the establishment of responsive people participation groups. Adopting a people-centred approach improves health management and patient outcomes.

#VaccinesWork

World Health Organization

VACCINES PROTECT AGAINST MORE THAN 20 DISEASES

COVID-19, CERVICAL CANCER, CHOLERA, DIPHTHERIA, EBOLA, HEPATITIS B, INFLUENZA, JAPANESE ENCEPHALITIS, MEASLES, MENINGITIS, MUMPS, PERTUSSIS, PNEUMONIA, POLIO, RABIES, ROTAVIRUS, RUBELLA, TETANUS, TYPHOID, VARICELLA, YELLOW FEVER

TALK TO YOUR HEALTH WORKER TO ENSURE VACCINATION IS UP TO DATE FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

“The ongoing heavy bombardment, evacuation orders and killing of civilians in Khan Younis, Gaza is just horrendous. WHO team joined an UNRWA mission to help those who were injured in today’s blast at the training centre where civilians were sheltering. Our deep condolences to the families who lost loved ones.”

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Secretary General



WHO and partners bring fuel to Al-Shifa, as remaining hospitals in Gaza face growing threats

WHO and partners completed another high-risk mission on Monday to resupply fuel to the Al-Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of people remain cut off from aid. Across the Gaza Strip, the few remaining hospitals find themselves in ever more dire circumstances, with hostilities often preventing access for patients and supplies, and health workers managing on little rest and scarce supplies.

The mission was carried out along with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, and Médecins Sans Frontières. The last humanitarian mission to northern Gaza took place on 12 January. Yesterday's mission, which delivered 19 000 liters of fuel to Al-Shifa Hospital, faced delays at the checkpoint. The roads leading to the hospital were severely damaged, and the desperation in northern Gaza was apparent, as thousands of civilians surrounded the UN vehicles and fuel truck in the hopes of finding food and water, also delaying the mission. In Al-Shifa Hospital, the mission saw that the functionality has improved since the last visit ten days ago. A significant decrease in the number of displaced people, from 40 000 to 10 000 was observed. [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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