

# Alert

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## Pakistan

# Dengue Outbreak in Punjab Province

Geneva, 20 September 2011

### 1. Brief description of the emergency

Dengue is the most widespread mosquito-borne infection in human beings, which in recent years has become a major international public health concern. Dengue is caused by a virus spread by *Aedes (Stegomyia)* mosquitoes and leads to serious health crisis for populations living in tropical, subtropical and temperate areas worldwide. Significant recent dengue outbreaks have occurred in five of the six World Health Organisation (WHO) regions. As the disease has grown in frequency and magnitude, an estimated 2.5 to 3 billion individuals living mainly in urban tropical and subtropical regions are most likely at risk. It is estimated that there are at least 100 million cases of dengue fever (DF) annually and 500,000 cases of dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF) which requires hospitalization and urgent care. Of the latter, 90% are children under the age of 15 years. DHF mortality rates average 5%, with approximately 25,000 deaths each year<sup>1</sup>.

### 2. Impact

Pakistan has repeatedly suffered from the outbreak in its high density regions such as Lahore in Punjab province and Karachi in Sindh. 95% of the reported cases are children under the age of 15 years. This year, the epidemic has struck Punjab province again with such intensity that hundreds of cases are coming out every day since the beginning of the monsoon season. The provincial government is overwhelmed by the propensity of the outbreak with 5,044 cases (as claimed by the state media) of dengue reported—an overwhelming 3,576 out of the total number of registered cases are in Lahore. Ten patients have already lost their lives and more cases of seriously infected victims are expected. Faisalabad is the second worst-hit city with 52 cases, followed by Multan with 26. Fourteen cases have surfaced in Sheikhpura, 11 in Nankana Sahib and 5 in Chakwal<sup>2</sup>.

The local hospitals have been inundated by the growing need for medical assistance to infected families as it has been reported that about 6,000 patients are visiting the Lahore General Hospital alone for diagnostics tests. It is worth noting that the hospital only has the capacity to treat about 800 patients daily<sup>3</sup>. The failure to get admitted

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<sup>1</sup> WHO Regional Report on Prevention & Control of Dengue Fever and DHF

<sup>2</sup> [www.tribune.com.pk](http://www.tribune.com.pk)

<sup>3</sup> [www.tribune.com.pk](http://www.tribune.com.pk)

in hospitals and treated in a timely manner is causing extreme anxiety among dengue patients. According to media reports, even patients in precarious conditions are unable to get admitted in to the hospitals.

### **3. National and international response**

The government of Punjab had developed the Punjab Health Help Line Project For Dengue where expert assistance and advice can be reached. Special spraying teams have been set up to kill virus carrying mosquitoes and their eggs. The chief minister in Punjab has instructed all schools to have dengue protection fumigation carried out in their school premises<sup>4</sup>. The Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), Young Doctors Association (YDA) and family physicians have recommended that the government allocate 50 percent of the 5,500 beds at 21 teaching hospitals in 11 private medical colleges for dengue patients. The surge in reported cases has forced the Pakistan army to step in and make necessary arrangement for the diagnosis and treatment of civilian patients in cantonment areas. The army has set up a 100 - bed ward at the CMH in Lahore for the purpose<sup>5</sup>. The Pakistan army has also established 300 camps in Lahore to facilitate treatment of dengue victims<sup>6</sup>. Lastly, the government of Punjab has directed all the co-operative housing societies to carry out fumigation against dengue virus<sup>7</sup>

### **4. ACT Alliance response**

ACT Forum Response: Of the ACT forum members in Pakistan (Church World Service, Pakistan/Afghanistan - CWS-P/A, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe – DKH, ICCO and Kerk in Actie, Christian Aid - CA and Norwegian Church Aid – NCA), CWS P/A is the only member currently initiating an ACT response. CWS-P/A is in close contact with its staff and local partners in the affected areas. It has been closely monitoring the situation and the arising needs since late August 2011. CWS-P/A remains actively involved in coordination efforts at the national and local levels.

Currently, it aims to provide prevention kits (mosquito nets and insect repellent lotion) as well as awareness raising sessions in the communities. It will also coordinate with local government departments in the provision of equipment for spraying which they can easily conduct even for future needs.

CWS-P/A is currently preparing a preliminary appeal.

**Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to Jean-Daniel Birmele, ACT Chief Finance Officer ([Jean.Daniel.Birmele@actalliance.org](mailto:Jean.Daniel.Birmele@actalliance.org)).**

**Thank you for your attention.**

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<sup>4</sup> [www.tribune.com.pk](http://www.tribune.com.pk)

<sup>5</sup> [www.nation.com.pk](http://www.nation.com.pk)

<sup>6</sup> [www.thenews.com.pk](http://www.thenews.com.pk)

<sup>7</sup> [www.thefrontierpost.com.pk](http://www.thefrontierpost.com.pk)