

Growing cholera outbreak in Syria infects hundreds, 39 dead

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A deadly cholera outbreak in Syria has killed at least 39 people and infected hundreds more this past month, health officials said Wednesday, raising concerns about whether the war-torn country can put a stop to its spread.

The U.N. and Syria's Health Ministry have said the source of the outbreak is believed to be linked to people drinking unsafe water from the Euphrates River and using [contaminated water](#) to irrigate crops, resulting in food contamination.

The outbreak hit government-held parts of the country as well as the areas in the northeast. Syria's [health services](#) have suffered heavily from its yearslong war and much of the country is short on cleaning [water supplies](#).

In government-held areas, the Health Ministry reported 23 deaths, 20 of them in the northern province of Aleppo in addition to at least 253 cases.

In areas of northeast Syria controlled by U.S.-backed Kurdish-led fighters, Jwan Mustafa, the top health official in the region reported 16 deaths since Sept. 5, and 2,867 suspected cases of cholera. In the rebel-held northwest, the first case was reported this week.

The cholera outbreak is the first in Syria since the conflict began in March 2011. The civil war has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced half the country's pre-war population, many of whom now live

in crowded tent settlements.

"A new epidemic looms over the lives of people throughout Syria as cholera threatens to spread throughout the country," said Sherine Ibrahim, CARE Turkey Country Director. Ibrahim added that many of those living in camps for displaced people lack "water, sanitation and basic health and hygiene services."

Mustafa, the health official speaking in the northern town of Qamishli, said the main cause of the outbreak is the presence of vibrio cholerae in the Euphrates river where [water levels](#) have dropped.

Ahmed Al-Mandhari, the World Health Organization's regional director, told The Associated Press on Monday that a plane carrying medical supplies to deal with the spread of cholera landed in the capital Damascus on Monday and another one was expected on Wednesday.

Al-Mandhari added that Syrian health authorities are coordinating with the international organization to contain the outbreak calling it a threat to Syria, the region and the whole world.

The cases were reported in several provinces, including Aleppo and Raqqa in the north, Latakia on the Mediterranean coast, and Deir el-Zour along the border with Iraq.

"The outbreak of cholera threatens more misery on hundreds of thousands of Syrians already at risk from hunger, conflict and the coming winter," Tanya Evans, the International Rescue Committee's country Director in Syria, said. "Across the country some 70% of the population now need help to meet their basic survival needs."

The Syrian Health Ministry advised people to make sure they drink water coming from "a secure source" and if that is not available people

should boil water then preserve it in a clean and closed gallon container.

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