

THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Office of the Minister

14th April 2023

PRESS STATEMENT JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN

SUBJECT: Ministry Of Health Statement on Declaration of Hepatitis E Virus (HEV) Disease Outbreak in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State

The Ministry of Health (MOH) would like to inform the general public that there is an outbreak of Hepatitis E Virus in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State.

On 22 March 2023, the Ministry of Health received a notification of cluster of cases presenting with yellowing of the eyes and deaths associated with the event.

In response to the reported suspect case, the Ministry of Health with support from WHO immediately deployed a multidisciplinary national rapid response team to conduct an epidemiological investigation, characterize the event, determine the magnitude and identify exposure/risk factors to guide control and prevention interventions. Between 23 March 2023 and 13 April 2023, a total of 44 blood samples were collected and tested for HEV IgM antibodies among which 35(79.5%) tested positive.

As of 13 April 2023, a cumulative total of 91 cases with symptoms and signs consistent with HEV disease and five deaths (Case Fatality Rate: 5.5%) were reported from Wau. Most cases (93%) are from Nazareth village in Wau South. The median age group affected is 20 years (Interquartile range: 2 – 71). Males are the most affected accounting for 73.6% of all reported cases.

Hepatitis E is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis E virus (HEV). HEV is found in the stool of an infected person; it is usually spread by the fecal-oral route, and the most common source of HEV infection is contaminated drinking water.

Typical signs and symptoms of hepatitis include:

- an initial phase of mild fever, reduced appetite (anorexia), nausea and vomiting lasting for a few days;
- abdominal pain, itching, skin rash, or joint pain;
- jaundice (yellow colour of the skin), dark urine and pale stools; and
- a slightly enlarged, tender liver (hepatomegaly).

On the basis of the risk of spread to other geographical areas, the Ministry of Health immediately puts in place the following response actions;


- Immediately activate the Public Health Emergency Operations Center to Response mode and all response pillars (coordination, surveillance, case management, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)/ Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Risk Communication and Community Engagement, RCCE), safe and dignified burial, Points of Entry (PoE), and logistics.
- Maintain the multi-disciplinary national rapid response team in Wau to continue supporting the State Ministry of Health and partners to mount full scale response in the areas of active case search and line listing of cases, additional sample collection and testing at Wau Teaching Hospital and the National Public Health Laboratory (NPHL), case management and infection prevention and control measures at health facilities, improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) conditions and IPC in affected communities.
- Develop a response plan to mobilize the needed resources and guide response interventions.

The Ministry of Health will continue to work with WHO and partners to ensure response efforts are fully implemented and the people of South Sudan are protected from the risk of HEV. The public is encouraged to observe the following public health measures to prevent HEV transmission:

1. Drink and use water that has been made safe after treating with chlorine or water that has been boiled until it bubbles (allow boiled water to cool on its own without adding ice).
2. Always wash your hands with soap and safe water after using the toilet/latrines, after cleaning a soiled child/baby, before eating, before feeding a child and after taking care and touching a HEV infected patient.
3. Use latrines to defecate. Do not defecate in or near a source of drinking water (stream, river or water hole).
4. Cook food well and always wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly with clean and safe water before eating them.
5. Keep a clean environment at home and in public places and ensure safe disposal of liquid and solid waste.

We urge the public not to **panic** but remain **calm** and observe all the precautionary measures mentioned above to prevent community transmission and high risk and vulnerable populations (schools, Universities, prisons, IDP/Refugee camps etc.).

The Public is further urged to be vigilant and report all suspected HEV cases to the national outbreak hotline **6666** or the nearest health facility, County Health Department, and/or State Ministry of Health.


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