

3 ENTERIC DISEASES

a Cholera awareness over December 2016 to January 2017

In the third week of November 2016, there were unconfirmed reports of cholera in Masvingo Province, southern Zimbabwe. In addition, ongoing outbreaks of cholera have been reported from DRC, Mozambique, Kenya, Somalia and other sub-Saharan African countries. To date, no confirmed or suspected cases of cholera have been reported in South Africa. However there is a risk of importation by travellers from affected countries during the festive season. The mode of cholera transmission is faecal-oral. Importation of cases followed by contamination of local water supplies will put populations that lack access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation at risk.

Therefore, all health facilities should be on alert, particularly those in Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces. Adequate supplies for specimen collection (rectal swabs, specimen jars and Cary-Blair transport medium), case management (oral-rehydration solution and intravenous Ringer's lactate), and copies of most recent cholera guidelines should be made available.

Symptoms of cholera include sudden onset of profuse, painless, watery diarrhoea with flecks of mucus in the stool (hence the name 'rice water stool') with or without vomiting. Patients may present with severe dehydration requiring rapid intravenous rehydration. When health personnel suspect cholera, they should:

- Verify that the patient meets case definition for a suspected cholera case
- Examine the patient for dehydration and manage fluid loss appropriately (See RSA cholera guidelines at www.nicd.ac.za)
- Collect a stool specimen and send it to the nearest NHLS laboratory, clearly labelling the specimen 'suspected cholera' (See specimen collection guidelines at www.nicd.ac.za)
- Notify the NICD hotline (082-883-9920) and the local and provincial communicable disease control co-ordinator (CDCC) telephonically.
- Complete a case investigation form (CIF) obtainable on the NICD website under the 'Diseases A-Z tab' and submit it to the provincial CDCC.
- Observe precautionary infection control procedures.
- NHLS laboratories should submit all *Vibrio cholerae* isolates to the NICD Centre for Enteric Diseases (011 386 6269) for further confirmation.

Source: Centre for Enteric Diseases, NICD-NHLS; Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS; outbreak@nicd.ac.za