

TOWARDS A GAME ON MANAGING THE RISK OF CHOLERA FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN IN GHANA

Background:

Cholera is on the rise with an estimated 1.4 billion people at risk in endemic countries and an estimated 3 million to 5 million cases and 100,000-120,000 deaths per year worldwide. In many endemic countries, children under 5 account for more than half of the global incidence and deaths. Cholera has remained endemic in some Asian countries for centuries, has become endemic in an increasing number of African countries with epidemics throughout the years. New, more virulent and drug-resistant strains of *Vibrio cholerae* continue to emerge, and the frequency of large protracted outbreaks with high case fatality ratios has increased, reflecting the lack of early detection, prevention and access to timely health care.

Ghana has experienced repeated severe cholera outbreaks in recent years. In 2014 alone, more than 15,400 cases and 126 deaths from cholera have been reported as of September 8, 2014. Many cases have been in the Greater Accra region, including in the districts of Accra Metro and La.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services are key elements of both the prevention of and response to cholera outbreaks. Where essential services such as WASH are not available, accessible or disrupted due to crises, people are more susceptible to WASH related illness and death. WASH goals are achieved through a combination of safe water supply, improved sanitation services and awareness raising around the importance of hygiene practices to prevent diseases to keep children and families healthy and well.

Work on the prevention of cholera typically focuses on sustainable provision of safe water and sanitation and hygiene promotion, which also help reduce the transmission of other diarrhoeal diseases. In cholera endemic and risk prone areas, significant efforts are made to ensure adequate water supply and disinfection, water quality monitoring, hygiene promotion, sanitation and safe excreta disposal at household and community levels and in cholera treatment facilities.

However, in the most vulnerable areas, like the urban slums of Greater Accra, a severe lack of even the most basic infrastructure for water supply or sanitation leads to frequent outbreaks and limited response capacity. Therefore, action-oriented information and the adoption of preventive behaviours become the most critical elements to avoiding or mitigating a cholera outbreak.

UNICEF has developed a number of resources to help countries and UNICEF country offices prevent, prepare for and respond to cholera outbreaks, including the comprehensive 'Cholera Toolkit'. It provides an integrated resource that addresses water, hygiene and sanitation, health and communication for development (C4D) as well as specific content linked to education, nutrition, child protection and other relevant sectors.

Communication for development (C4D) during cholera outbreaks usually seeks to share relevant, action-oriented information so that people in affected communities know how to protect themselves, their families and their communities, including those with disabilities, the elderly and other especially vulnerable groups from the disease.

Strategy:

Hygiene behaviour change and health promotion are core elements of UNICEF Ghana's country programme document (CPD) and at the heart of its rights-based approach to programming. Given the recurring and severe outbreaks of cholera in the country, cholera prevention, preparedness and response are priority areas cutting across UNICEF's WASH, health and C4D programmes demanding an integrated approach. UNICEF's work on cholera prevention, preparedness and response builds on its existing partnerships with Ghana's Ministry of Health, Ghana Health Service, Ghana Education Service through its School Health Education Programme (SHEP), and others.

The severity of recent cholera outbreaks in Ghana points to (a) an obvious lack of basic WASH infrastructure and the need for increased investments in clean water supply and effective sanitation in endemic areas, and (b) a lack of knowledge and awareness regarding effective prevention and response behaviours and the urgent need for large-scale behaviour change education.

The proposed collaboration seeks to strengthen national awareness and prevention of cholera by inducing positive behaviours and peer-to-peer education on cholera prevention. SHEP seems to be a favourable entry point thanks to its network of SHEP coordinators from the national and regional down to the districts and school levels. However, other entry points are possible and will be explored as the design phase of the proposed project proceeds.

The proposed collaboration seeks to strengthen national awareness and active prevention of cholera outbreaks by inducing positive behaviours and peer-to-peer education on cholera prevention.

Objective:

Develop an educational game that

- a) actively engages children and young adolescents to learn concrete cholera-preventive behaviours in a playful and deeply experiential manner, and
- b) equips the players with action-oriented knowledge how they can be peer educators and help their families and communities adopt healthy behaviours.

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