

Report from the field – cholera in the DRC

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24-04-18



Dit is de omschrijving

Cholera has been around for a long time. The bacterial disease is transmitted through contaminated water or food, and is associated with poverty and a lack of hygienic conditions. Cholera causes severe acute diarrhea and vomiting, and can lead to death if left untreated. We know what cholera is and how it can be treated, but there continue to be outbreaks affecting the poorest and most vulnerable people.

In March 2018, ITM sent epidemiologist Florian Vogt to support the response of the World Health Organization to the ongoing cholera outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The current outbreak has been going on for several years and is considered as the worst cholera epidemic in the country since 1994. Since the beginning of 2017, more than 62,000 suspected cases and over 1,300 deaths have been reported. The epidemic is declining in size but spreading in geography. This makes timely reporting of new suspect cases in new areas crucial.

While in the DRC, Florian Vogt assisted the WHO in setting up the piloting of a new smart-phone based notification system. These alerts can be picked up immediately at the provincial or national level, reducing the timing from the detection of a person who has fallen ill to the outbreak response. This shows the importance of testing of new and innovative tools, not only for emerging and high-profile diseases like Ebola or Zika, but also for well-known recurring diseases like cholera.

There are several other aspects of cholera where ITM's outbreak research team is exploring how it can make a contribution. Research opportunities include interventions regarding better and more simple ways to vaccinate people at risk, sanitation interventions or the role the mobility of the population plays in the spreading of the disease.