

UN health agency announces list of bacteria for which new antibiotics are urgently needed

27 February 2017 – The United Nations health agency today published its first-ever catalogue of antibiotic-resistant bacteria that pose the greatest threat to human health.

The list of priority pathogens consisting of 12 families of bacteria was drawn up to guide and promote research and development (R&D) of new antibiotics, as part of the World Health Organization (WHO)'s efforts to address growing global resistance to antimicrobial medicines.

“This list is a new tool to ensure R&D responds to urgent public health needs,” said Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO's Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation in a news release.

“Antibiotic resistance is growing, and we are fast running out of treatment options. If we leave it to market forces alone, the new antibiotics we most urgently need are not going to be developed in time,” she warned.

The list highlights in particular the threat of 'gram-negative' bacteria that are resistant to multiple antibiotics. These bacteria have built-in abilities to find new ways to resist treatment and can pass along genetic material that allows other bacteria to become drug-resistant as well.

The WHO list is divided into three categories according to the urgency of need for new antibiotics: critical, high and medium priority.

Priority 1: CRITICAL

- *Acinetobacter baumannii*, carbapenem-resistant
- *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, carbapenem-resistant
- *Enterobacteriaceae*, carbapenem-resistant, ESBL-producing

The most critical group of all includes multidrug resistant bacteria that pose a particular threat in hospitals, nursing homes, and among patients whose care requires devices such as ventilators and blood catheters. They include *Acinetobacter*, *Pseudomonas* and various *Enterobacteriaceae*, including *Klebsiella*, *E. coli*, *Serratia*, and *Proteus*. They can cause severe and often deadly infections such as bloodstream infections and pneumonia.

These bacteria have become resistant to a large number of antibiotics, including carbapenems and third generation cephalosporins – the best available antibiotics for treating multi-drug resistant bacteria.

G20 health experts will meet this week in Berlin. The list is intended to spur governments to put in place policies that incentivize basic science and advanced R&D by both publicly funded agencies and the private sector investing in new antibiotic discovery.

While more R&D is vital, alone, it cannot solve the problem. To address resistance, there must also be better prevention of infections and appropriate use of existing antibiotics in humans and animals, as well as rational use of any new antibiotics that are developed in future.

Refugees and migrants taking 'enormous risks' to reach Europe – UN agency

27 February 2017 – Increased border restrictions and lack of accessible legal ways to reach Europe have caused refugees and migrants to take more diversified and dangerous journeys, such as relying on people-smugglers or using flimsy boats to cross rough seas, a new report by the United Nations refugee agency has revealed.

This report clearly shows that the lack of accessible and safe pathways leads refugees and migrants to take enormous risks while attempting to reach Europe, including those simply trying to join family members. said Vincent Cochetel, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Director of Europe Bureau, in a news release announcing the report.

According to Desperate Journeys, issued today by UNHCR, the closure of the Western Balkan route and the European Union (EU)-Turkey Statement in March 2016, caused a drastic decrease in the number of people reaching Greece via the Eastern Mediterranean route.

However since then, the Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy become the primary entry point to Europe and arrival trends in Italy show that the primary nationalities who crossed to Greece had not switched in significant numbers to the Central Mediterranean route.

In addition to drowning, migrants and refugees also risk of being kidnapped, held against their will for several days, physical and sexual abuse, torture and extortion by smugglers and criminal gangs at several points along key routes.

The Central Mediterranean route

The UN agency pointed out that in 2016, some 181,436 arrived in Italy by sea in need of international protection, and also victims of trafficking and migrants seeking better lives. About 90 per cent of them travelled by boat from Libya, and the top two nationalities of those arriving were Nigerians

(21 per cent) and Eritreans (11 per cent).

This route is particularly dangerous and, in 2016, recorded more deaths at sea than ever before.

RELATED: UN reports more than 300 migrant deaths on Mediterranean crossing in first two months of 2017

Furthermore, children making this journey are especially vulnerable, and the number of unaccompanied and separated children arriving is increasing. Last year more than 25,000 came, representing 14 per cent of all new arrivals in Italy.

“Their number more than doubled compared to the previous year,” said UNHCR.

The Western and Eastern Mediterranean routes

The report also showed that in the last part of 2016, more people reached the continent through the Western Mediterranean route, either by crossing the sea to Spain from Morocco and Algeria, or by entering the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta.

Similarly, people continued to leave Turkey along the Eastern Mediterranean route from April onwards, but in much smaller numbers. Most crossed the sea to Greece or Cyprus, others also crossed via land into the country or into Bulgaria.

Most who arrived by sea to Greece (87 per cent) came from the top ten refugee producing countries.

This was also the case for those who continued to move along the Western Balkans route: in Serbia, for instance, 82 per cent of those who arrived came from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and almost half are children – 20 per cent of those unaccompanied.

These numbers, however, numbers have reduced since April 2016, noted UNHCR.

Additionally, according to the study, tens of thousands of people also have been reportedly pushed back by border authorities in Europe, including in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Serbia, Spain, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with many cases of alleged violence and abuses in an apparent attempt to deter further entry attempts.

Drought threatens 1.5 million Somalis;

UN health agency scales up response

27 February 2017 – Less than half of the people in Somalia have access to basic health services, the United Nations health agency today said, announcing that it is scaling up its response in the country amid a severe drought and worsening food crisis.

“Somalia is now at a critical point as a result of this drought and environmental hazards and lack of basic services,” said UN World Health Organization's (WHO) Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr. Mahmoud Fikri.

The UN agency said that it is providing “all possible support” to address the ongoing challenges. That includes sending in rapid response teams to areas of greatest threat. That includes sending medicines and medical supplies to health facilities in drought-affected areas.

Some 1.5 million people are believed to be affected by the severe drought and worsening food crisis. More than 400,000 of those people are malnourished children.

In addition, the drought conditions are causing epidemic-prone diseases to spread. These include cholera and measles. According to WHO, since early January, more than 6,000 cases of cholera have been reported, as well as more than 2,500 cases of suspected measles.

The UN has launched an appeal for \$825 million for the first half of 2017 for the pre-famine response. Of this, the health sector requires \$85 million, including \$10 million for the WHO.

In Yemen, UN aid chief rallies support for relief efforts to prevent famine

27 February 2017 – The parties to the conflict in Yemen need to continue providing humanitarian access, and the international community needs to step up its funding for life-saving operations, the United Nations relief aid chief said today during his visit to the port city of Aden.

“I have come to Aden with the first humanitarian UN flight to lend support to the humanitarians who have been working in this city and in Yemen since the conflict escalated in March 2015,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien told reporters there.

“Today, almost 19 million people in Yemen need humanitarian assistance.

Seven million people don't know where their next meal is coming from and we now face a serious risk of famine,” he added.

Mr. O'Brien said the purpose of his visit was also to meet with senior Government officials to discuss how to prevent a possible famine and how to better protect the civilians that are caught in this conflict.

In Aden and the surrounding governorates, 3.1 million people need humanitarian assistance, two thirds of whom are in desperate need of food, he warned.

RELATED: As Yemen's food crisis worsens, UN agencies call for urgent assistance to avert catastrophe

Yesterday, in meetings with President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, Prime Minister Ahmed Obeid bin Daghr and other senior officials, the top UN aid official stressed the need for all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and to allow for unimpeded and immediate full access by humanitarian partners to all of Yemen.

Given the urgency of the situation, they also discussed the need to facilitate commercial imports of food, fuel and medicine, through all ports of Yemen, and the resumption of commercial flights to all of Yemen, Mr. O'Brien said.

“Yesterday, I saw with my own eyes the destruction of the war and the impact on the people living in Aden,” he said, noting that he was especially pleased to know that two babies – a boy and a girl – were born while he was at a maternity hospital. “They are Yemen's hope and future,” he said.

In the Aden hub, more than 55 humanitarian organizations are working to meet pressing needs.

“We are here to help and provide neutral, impartial life-saving assistance to all people in need, regardless of where they are in Yemen,” Mr. O'Brien said, stressing that there are no military solutions to this conflict and only peace can provide a lasting solution to this unfolding humanitarian crisis.

Germany: UN rights panel highlights racial profiling against people of

African descent

27 February 2017 – People of African descent in Germany suffer racial discrimination, Afrophobia and racial profiling in their daily lives, but their situation remains largely invisible to the wider society, a United Nations expert panel said today at the end of its first official visit to the country.

“The repeated denial that racial profiling does not exist in Germany by police authorities and the lack of an independent complaint mechanism at federal and state level fosters impunity,” said Ricardo Sunga, who currently heads the expert panel, in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Established on 25 April 2002 by the then Commission on Human Rights, following the World Conference against Racism held in Durban in 2001, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent is composed of five independent experts: Mr. Sunga (the Philippines), current Chair-Rapporteur; Michal Balcerzak (Poland); Mireille Fanon Mendes-France (France), Sabelo Gumede (South Africa) and Ahmed Reid (Jamaica).

A Working Group delegation visited Berlin, Dessau, Dresden, Frankfurt, Wiesbaden, Düsseldorf, Cologne and Hamburg from 20 to 27 February, to gain first-hand knowledge on discriminatory practices affecting people of African descent in Germany.

“There is a serious lack of ethnicity-based disaggregated data, and an incomplete understanding of history, which obscure the magnitude of structural and institutional racism people of African descent face,” Mr. Sunga said, explaining that the Working Group believes that institutional racism and racist stereotyping by the criminal justice system has led to a failure to effectively investigate and prosecute perpetrators of racist violence, racial profiling and hate crimes against people of African descent.

During the eight-day mission, the human rights experts engaged with representatives of the German Federal and State authorities, representatives of national and provincial human rights institutions and civil society. The delegation welcomed ongoing efforts by the administration to address racial discrimination faced by people of African descent.

The Working group will present a report containing its findings and recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2017.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.