a An update on Tropical Cyclone Idai

On 14 March 2019, Tropical Cyclone Idai made landfall in Mozambique, bringing devastation to the port city of Beira and surrounding areas. Over the following days, torrential rains and strong winds swept through the central region of the country, causing massive flooding and leaving entire communities submerged. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, there was an inspiring and instant outpouring of international support and solidarity. More than 14 countries, including South Africa, deployed over 100 military or rescue planes, helicopters, ships and boats to support aid efforts. Medical and relief supplies were flown in from around the world, with South Africa donating just under four tons of medical supplies for primary health care. This was delivered by the South African Military Health Service to support health response, as 80% of the healthcare facilities in the region were affected, including those providing much needed antiretroviral therapy. In addition, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases assisted the Mozambican National Public Health Institute to obtain much needed laboratory consumables for diagnostic purposes.

As commendable as the response from the international community has been, the heavy rains and strong winds experienced in the week of 14 April have damaged roads and shelters in several locations, making humanitarian access more difficult, and impacting communities that were only just beginning to recover from the floods. As of 18 April, there were 68 974 internally displaced people living in accommodation across 67 sites. This has decreased from the initial almost 150 000 people. Just over 1.3 million people have been reached with aid; however, the entire 1.85 million population in the affected areas is still in need of assistance as recovery efforts continue.

Many schools were being used as temporary accommodation centres for internally displaced people. However, tented accommodation centres have been erected across the affected areas so that schools can get back to providing education. Education partners are assisting the Government to clear schools of internally displaced people in order to support the resumption of regular classes. However, students have reported challenges, including the lack of books, school bags and uniforms, as well as concerns over the dilapidated state of the school structures.

From a communicable disease perspective, the flooding and displacement of people has increased the risk of malaria, typhoid, cholera and other diseases. A large-scale oral cholera vaccine campaign delivered vaccine to over 800 000 people in just six days. The result has been a decrease in the daily reporting of cholera cases. The current communicable disease challenge is the increasing number of malaria cases with the last reported official case numbers as 12 297. As malaria is endemic in Mozambique, control efforts are now hampered in the affected regions. The effects of Tropical Cyclone Idai have been far-reaching with Malawi and Zimbabwe also being affected. Both countries are in the process of recovery. In response to effects of the cyclone, the South African National Department of Health’s Malaria Directorate has implemented an Epidemic Preparedness and Response plan for vector-borne diseases with emphasis being placed in the provinces that border both Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Source: World Health Organization (www.who.int); Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS; outbreak@nicd.ac.za

8 CHOLERA ALERT FOR TRAVELLERS

Since Cyclone Idai struck Mozambique on 14 March 2019, hundreds of thousands of people have been living in temporary settlements without access to safe water and sanitation [NICD Communiqué April 2019, Vol 18(4)]. The Ministry of Health of Mozambique declared a cholera outbreak on 27 March, and as of 8 April 2019, had reported more than 3 577 cases and six deaths. The cyclone also stormed through parts of Zimbabwe and Malawi, increasing the risk of cholera outbreaks in these cholera endemic countries. As of 29 April 2019, there are no confirmed or suspected cases of cholera in South Africa. However, there is a risk that travellers from the outbreak-affected areas may present with cholera in South Africa.

Travellers should be aware of the risk of cholera. Cholera is usually transmitted through contaminated drinking water or food. However, cholera can also be transmitted following direct contact with infective material (e.g. stool or vomitus), so transmission within households is not uncommon. All people visiting areas where there are known cholera cases should be aware of the basic cholera facts that can be found on the NICD website at this link, http://www.nicd.ac.za/index.php/cholera/. Importantly travellers should follow these basic prevention steps to protect themselves and their families: drink and use safe water, wash hands often with soap and safe water, eat well-cooked food (especially seafood), keep food covered, eat it whilst hot, and wash or peel fruits and vegetables.