

## **Cholera preparedness for South African travelers and health care workers**

A number of cholera outbreaks are ongoing or have been reported in the past month from the African continent or neighbouring countries.

- An outbreak of cholera is ongoing in Zimbabwe since September 2018. According to a situation report released on 2 December 2018, 10 443 cases of cholera have been notified in Zimbabwe of which 278 have been confirmed. The outbreak in Harare and surrounding suburbs is under control. A total of 9 845 cases have been reported by 1 December 2018 with the majority reported from Glen View (n=4 405) and Budiriro (n=2 857). Since 16 November 2018, fewer than 10 cases per day have been reported, and no new cases have been reported since 27 November. However a new outbreak has been reported from Mt Darwin District, Mashonaland Central province, with 181 cases and 4 deaths (case fatality rate 2.2%) reported from 22 November until 1 December.
- Cholera has been reported in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Tanzania, Somalia, the northern parts of Nigeria and Yemen.

No locally-acquired cases of cholera have been reported from South Africa as of 30 November 2018. However, 4 laboratory-confirmed cases of cholera have been identified amongst migrant workers who travelled to Zimbabwe or had close contact with someone who travelled to Zimbabwe prior to their illness onset. Two of the cases were confirmed in Gauteng Province on 2 and 4 October 2018, respectively, after being admitted and treated at Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Tshwane. The two cases were related; the index case returned from Zimbabwe with diarrhea. Her husband who washed her clothes and soiled linen subsequently developed diarrhea and was admitted to same hospital in October 2018. The other two cases were confirmed in Limpopo Province, and were admitted and treated at Helena Franz Hospital on 4 and 19 November 2018 respectively. The two cases in Limpopo Province are not related and work at different farms, both with a travel history to Zimbabwe and contact with a returning traveler from Zimbabwe prior to illness onset. No cholera-related deaths have been reported. The Department of Health in Limpopo Province is monitoring the situation and conducting regular site visit to the farms to identify new cases and provide health education.

Travelers to areas affected by cholera outbreaks should observe good hand hygiene and food preparation practices. Wash hands with soap and water after going to the toilet and changing nappies, before cooking, and before eating. Wash fruits and vegetables with clean water before eating. Cook food thoroughly, and keep it at safe temperatures. Travelers may use the following measures to ensure safe water:

1. Boiling: Place water in a clean container and boil it for at least 5 minutes.
2. Bleach: Add 1 teaspoon of household bleach (containing 5% chlorine) to 20-25 litres of water. Leave it to stand (in a clean, closed container) for at least half an hour before use.
3. Water purification tablets: These can be bought at your local pharmacy. Follow the instructions on the packaging.
4. Store safe water in a clean, closed container. Use a clean cup each time to scoop water from the container, or pour water directly from the container when you need it.

South African healthcare workers countrywide, especially those in Limpopo Province, should be on high alert for suspected cholera amongst returning travelers, especially those from cholera-affected areas. Healthcare workers should suspect cholera in a person of any age presenting with acute onset of watery diarrhoea (with or without dehydration), especially if there is a history of recent travel to/from Zimbabwe.

All suspected cholera cases should be immediately notified to the relevant Department of Health officials. Healthcare workers should ensure that stools or rectal swab specimens are collected from suspected cholera cases. Specimens should be sent in Cary-Blair transport medium to the laboratory with a specific request for cholera testing. Healthcare facilities and laboratories should have adequate resources for specimen collection, laboratory testing, and management of cases. The public, especially those living in close proximity to the South African–Zimbabwe border, are encouraged to use safe water and practice good hygiene to reduce the risk of cholera and other diarrhoeal diseases. Health care workers are referred to the document [‘Cholera alert for Health Care workers’](#) and other material on the NICD website: [www.nicd.ac.za](http://www.nicd.ac.za), Diseases A-Z, under ‘Cholera’