



[Humanitarian Aid Organizations Warn of a Rapidly Growing Cholera Outbreak in Syria](#)

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and other humanitarian aid organizations have issued warnings regarding the troubling cholera outbreak in Syria. Cases of the disease continue to rise in what has been deemed the first such happening in more than a decade. Observers highlight that one of the major causes of the health crisis is the lack of access to clean water as a result of the longstanding Syrian conflict, which has left many reliant on unsafe sources due to destruction of the national water infrastructure. According to experts, the war has damaged two-thirds of water treatment plants, half of pumping stations, and one-third of water towers in the country. The cholera outbreak has killed at least 29 people, and the total number of confirmed infections has surpassed 2,000. There are also fears that a substantial under-reporting of suspected cases is likely, particularly in the northeast areas of the country.

Cholera is an acute diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with *Vibrio cholerae* bacteria. People can get sick when they swallow food or water contaminated with cholera bacteria. Analysts suspect that the outbreak is linked to the presence of bacteria in the waters of the Euphrates River. The safety of the river water has experienced a serious decline due to the effects of climate change turning it into a swamp land in many areas. Exacerbating the issue is the fact that an estimated 30% of the Syrian population relies on the Euphrates River for drinking water sources.

The first confirmed cholera cases were detected almost a month ago in Deir al-Zor province, before spreading to other areas including the cities of Raqqa and Hasaka. There are more than 4,350 suspected cases and at least 100 confirmed cases in the northeastern region of Syria alone. The disease is impacting a growing number of civilians across the country. Additionally alarming is that about 590 vulnerable refugee camps in the Idlib region suffer from a lack of clean drinking water, and 226 possess meager amounts of clean water. Furthermore, over half of the camps suffer from an open sewage system, which is an incubator for the spread of infectious diseases such as cholera.

This outbreak of cholera is only a symptom of the overarching issue of water shortage in Syria, caused almost exclusively by the conflict that has ravaged the country since 2011. Previously, over 90% of Syrians had access to safe and clean drinking water. Now, however, that number has decreased by 40%. The water shortage has led to mandated water rationing, which does not provide families with sufficient water and thus pushes them to unclean sources that are teeming with diseases such as cholera. The reasons for the water shortage are varied, but hardly difficult to understand given the devastation of the longstanding Syrian conflict. Violence has directly destroyed infrastructure responsible for the production of clean water, and has caused a sharp reduction in the number of employees working in the water production industry. The conflict has also hindered waste removal efforts, allowing contaminants into the water supply, which not only makes the water unsafe to drink but damages the quality of food and the environment itself. Scientific research also suggests that Syria is being negatively impacted by the effects of climate change which have made the region increasingly more arid and prone to drought. Experts warn over the potential for an abundance of outbreaks in the near future if actions are not taken to mitigate the aforementioned factors.