Diphtheria Outbreak SitRep No. 3
Reporting Period
19 October - 30 November 2023

Nigeria

HIGHLIGHTS

• As of early December 2023, 20,725 suspected cumulative cases have been reported since December 2022, of which 12,505 cases were confirmed (60%) across 35 states (267 LGAs). Some 570 deaths have been confirmed.
• 99 percent of cases are from the Northwest (Kano, Katsina) and Northeast (Yobe, Bauchi, and Borno States).
• 2.7 million children aged 6 weeks to 4 years were vaccinated against diphtheria during the first round of the reactive vaccination with pentavalent vaccines, while a total of 5.1m children aged 5 to 14 years were reached with Tetanus-Diphtheria (Td) vaccines in 56 high-risk LGAs in 7 states.
• Two survey findings on Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) indicated adequate awareness levels on the signs and symptoms and the risk perception about diphtheria (70% - U-report and 86.9% KAP survey), there were significant discrepancies in the understanding regarding modes of transmission.
• In total, US$3 million was mobilized to sustain the response to the outbreak in 7 high-priority states (Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Kaduna, Bauchi, Borno, and Yobe) over the next 6 months.

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

14,000,000
Children in need of vaccination against diphtheria

20,725
Suspected cases

12,505
Confirmed cases

7,867,791
Children vaccinated against diphtheria.

3,050,000 US$
Mobilized to respond to the outbreak in 7 states

DIPHTHERIA CASE MAP AND EPI CURVE

Data source: NCDC, National Diphtheria EOC meeting, 31 Dec. 2023
SITUATION OVERVIEW

Since December 2022, Nigeria experienced a large diphtheria outbreak, which peaked in August 2023. As of early December 2023, there are 20,725 suspected cumulative cases of which 12,505 have been confirmed by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) since the beginning of the outbreak.

The outbreak has claimed 570 lives (CFR 4.6%). Improvement in case management and increased availability of Diphtheria Antitoxin (DAT) have resulted in the reduction of the weekly case fatality rate to less than 1 per cent.

Kano State in northwestern Nigeria represents the outbreak’s epicentre with 80% of confirmed cases. Kano, combined with Yobe, Katsina, Bauchi, and Borno States in the North, reported 99% of the confirmed cases.

The outbreak spread to 35 states and 267 LGAs, with suspected cross-border transmissions with the Republic of Niger, as cases have been reported in Zinder, Niger.

Analysis of vaccination status highlighted that 58.3% of all confirmed cases were not fully vaccinated (32.8% unvaccinated and 25.5% partially vaccinated).

SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF PROGRAMME RESPONSE

UNICEF’s response to the outbreak extends from the national level through active participation in the government-led Diphtheria Emergency Task Team and at state and LGA levels. The risk of the outbreak spreading beyond its current focal point in the North to the rest of the country remains significant, primarily because of low immunization coverage. UNICEF’s response continues to prioritize addressing existing immunity gaps through reactive vaccination, with Round One completed, enhancing awareness about the disease and communities’ trust and empowerment through Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) and preventing transmission and reducing deaths through active involvement in Case Management and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC). During Round Two of the Campaign, UNICEF will integrate a Measles Vaccination Campaign in 11 LGAs across Jigawa and Bauchi States.

I. Coordination and Leadership

UNICEF actively participates in the National Diphtheria Emergency Task Team, which was activated in September to respond to the outbreak and determined the strategic focus on 56 LGAs in 7 states (Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Kaduna, Bauchi, Borno, and Yobe). UNICEF further participates in state-level government coordination fora in all the 7 states. UNICEF supports the response pillars of RCCE, case management/ IPC, and the reactive vaccination response.

Additionally, UNICEF participates in the national-level inter-agency coordination platform, led by the WHO, which was activated to enhance collaboration on shared technical support and advocacy interventions.

II. Case Management and Infection Prevention and Control

UNICEF continues to support the Case Management and IPC (Infection Prevention and Control) pillar coordination platforms. During the reporting period, the following activities were conducted with UNICEF support:

- Reactivation of Facility IPC Committees: 12 facilitators were sent across Kano primary healthcare centers (PHC) to train and reactivate facility IPC committees consisting of 1,300 personnel in over 132 facilities. Some 44 States officials and partners were deployed to monitor the conduct of the reactivation.
- Provision of monthly stipends to ad-hoc healthcare workers to strengthen the transition of Diphtheria Treatment Centers.

III. Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)

UNICEF continues to support the risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) pillar coordination platforms at both federal and state levels. During the reporting period, the following activities were conducted with UNICEF support:

- A national Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) survey was conducted by the Nigeria Center for Disease Control in 100 LGAs across 8 states (Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Yobe, and Zamfara). A subsequent U-report poll in Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Katsina, and Yobe States engaged with 90,857 U-reporters to gather insights. While the two surveys indicated adequate awareness levels on the signs and symptoms and the risk perception about Diphtheria (70% - U-report and 86.9% KAP survey), there were significant discrepancies on the understanding regarding modes of transmission. Based on the national Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) survey findings, a package of actionable recommendations was prepared with state-disaggregated data.
- Based on the national Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) survey findings, a package of actionable recommendations was done with state-disaggregated data. In Borno, these recommendations were the basis for adjusting the RCCE plan.
- A rapid qualitative data collection was done in Kano State with caregivers, elderly community members, volunteers, community mobilizers, and RCCE facilitators to understand the potential risks, concerns, and questions around having several vaccination campaigns rolled out at the same time. Main suggestions were shared with the State health authorities.
- One national media training was conducted at the federal level, involving 52 media representatives (radio, television, print, and wire services) from the 7 affected States and from the national level. Participants also included 17 implementing government partners from the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC), National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), Ministries of Health and Education, National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), and 7 partners from UNICEF, WHO, Breakthrough ACTION, CoreGroup, and the Nigerian Red Cross.
IV. Reactive Vaccination
UNICEF supported the vaccination pillar coordination platforms at both federal and state levels.

- Three rounds of reactive vaccination campaigns against diphtheria, with a minimum of four weeks apart, are underway in the 56 high-priority LGAs in seven states.
- To date, 2.7m children aged 6 weeks to 4 years have been vaccinated against diphtheria during the first round of the reactive vaccination with pentavalent vaccines (vs. targeted 3,34m), while a total of 5.1m children aged 5 to 14 years have been reached with Tetanus-Diphtheria (Td) vaccines (vs targeted of the 6,49m children) in 56 high-risk LGAs in 7 states.
- Vaccination Round Two commenced in Bauchi and Kano States in November. UNICEF will integrate a Measles Vaccination Campaign in 11 LGAs across Jigawa and Bauchi States.
- Round Three is planned through January 2024, and will target 62 LGAs.
- A Lot Quality Assurance Sampling (LQAS) took place across 6 states in October. Overall, 26 of the 58 sampled LGAs passed.

V. WASH
UNICEF’s Kano Field Office supported sanitation and hygiene interventions in two LGAs (Rano and Gezawa) in Kano State, to improve the practice of handwashing among the people living in areas affected by the diphtheria outbreak. Some 30,036 handwashing facilities were constructed and are in use in households across the two LGAs.

VI. Supply
- In support of the Government of Nigeria, a variety of funding channels were utilized to secure access to the global market of Td and Penta vaccines, including:
  - UNICEF Nigeria Health Section budget
  - Gavi Alliance funding
  - The Government of Nigeria’s World Bank Loan
  - UNICEF Supply Division’s Vaccine Independence Initiative, with risk-sharing provided by the World Bank and UNICEF Nigeria

- 15.5 million doses of Td and 20 million doses of Penta have been procured with full delivery expected by January 2024.
- 15.5 million doses of Td and 7.1 million doses of Penta were delivered to Nigeria (as of 21 November).
- An additional 28 million doses of Td and 3.5 million doses of Penta were in the funding pipeline to arrive in the country by February 2024.
- Procured quantities will support an increased outbreak response or routine immunization needs going into 2024, subject to the dynamic situation on the ground.

VII. Human resources
In addition to country office and sub-office staff engaged in the response, 4 headquarter staff were deployed to support the response in the areas of coordination and leadership (1), immunization (2), RCCE (1), and information/data management (1). The deployment of an immunization specialist was extended and the data specialist was redeployed.

FUNDING OVERVIEW AND PARTNERSHIP
With the generous support from partners - notably the Alwaleed Foundation, the US Fund for UNICEF, and the European Union Humanitarian Aid - as well as reprogramming of internal resources, funds in the amount of $3.05 million were made available (76% for vaccines, 14% for case management, including community management, 4% for WASH, 3% for RCCE and 2% for additional support) to respond to urgent needs in 56 priority LGAs across 7 states during the first round, and 62 priority LGAs during the second round.

Without additional funding, an additional 40 priority LGAs were unable to be reached with a reactive vaccination campaign against diphtheria. Twenty of these are also Zero Dose LGAs – Zero Dose referring to a child who has not received any routine vaccination. Funding would have facilitated the following activities: procurement and shipment of vaccines, operational support to campaign implementation, procurement of supplies for case management, IPC, RCCE and community-based activities.
COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVOCACY

The CAP section actively responded to the diphtheria outbreak in Kano by producing communication products and assets and by collaborating with media partners, celebrities and community influencers.

Press Releases

- UNICEF Nigeria Raises Alarm Over Unprecedented Diphtheria Outbreak, Urges Urgent Vaccination, 27 Sep. 2023

Video

- Battling the Diphtheria Outbreak in Nigeria
- Reactions to Child Vaccination: What 10 Mums Said

Human Interest Stories

Amid Nigeria’s diphtheria outbreak, healthcare workers like Dr. Salma Suwaid are on the frontline to close a decade-long immunization gap, emphasizing the lifesaving value of vaccines for children. For more, read Vaccines: The Unyielding Shield Against Diphtheria’s Heartbreak in Nigeria.

Advocacy

UNICEF champions who have strong fan following and are active on social media were enlisted to produce public service announcements (PSAs) with the aim of raising awareness about diphtheria. Click here to see. Additionally, a special session with On-Air Radio Personalities was produced on the causes of diphtheria with the aim of dispelling mis/disinformation. Social Media Messaging highlighted UNICEF and partners response and emphasized the importance of vaccines.

- https://twitter.com/UNICEF_Nigeria/status/1707316630282178645
- https://twitter.com/UNICEF_Nigeria/status/1706589967382728879/photo/1
- https://www.instagram.com/p/CxnrAR-hMbxt/?img_index=1
- https://www.instagram.com/p/CxrMGFMYA1/
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- https://www.instagram.com/p/CxVoefxsajS/
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