STM JOURNALS

International Journal of
Tropical Medicines

ISSN: 3048-6262
Volume 3, Issue 1, 2026
January—June
DOI (Journal): 10.37591/IJTM

https://journals.stmjournals.com/ijtm/

Review IJTM

Infectious Illnesses in Areas of Violence and Among Refugees

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Abstract

Infectious illnesses are a huge and ongoing hazard in conflict zones and among refugee populations. This is because frail health systems, population relocation, and poor living conditions all come together to make transmission risks higher. Armed conflict undermines vital public health infrastructure, such as vaccination programs, disease surveillance, water and sanitation systems, and access to medical care, resulting in the resurgence and proliferation of avoidable and treatable illnesses. Refugee camps are overcrowded, people are malnourished, they don't have enough clean water, and they don't have enough shelter, which makes them much more likely to get diseases including tuberculosis, measles, cholera, malaria, and acute respiratory infections. Also, impediments to getting healthcare, such feeling unsafe, not having legal status, and not having enough resources, make it take longer to get a diagnosis and treatment, which makes people sicker and more likely to die. Antimicrobial resistance is a developing concern in these environments due to disrupted treatment regimens and constrained diagnostic capabilities. This article looks at the epidemiology of infectious diseases in populations affected by conflict, the structural and social factors that lead to disease transmission, and the problems that humanitarian and public health solutions face. It also emphasises the need for coordinated action by countries around the world, better surveillance, more vaccinations, and including infectious disease control in humanitarian efforts. Dealing with infectious diseases in war-torn areas is not only a moral obligation, but it is also a key part of global health security.

Keywords: Infectious diseases, conflict zones, refugee populations, public health infrastructure watching for diseases, antimicrobial resistance

INTRODUCTION

In places afflicted by violence, poor hygiene and sanitation, a breakdown in health infrastructure, mobility, and displacement all help infectious illnesses spread and grow. Estimates say that 50 million people around the world live in these kinds of conditions, which is twice as many as 20 years ago [1]. Water and sanitation issues, not enough shelter, and not enough access to healthcare are all common causes of humanitarian catastrophes. Poor housing, large-scale population movements, the failure of immunisation programs, the decreasing availability of antiretrovirals for persons living with HIV, and the cessation of infection prevention measures in health institutions are all things that make the risk of infection worse. People who are affected by conflicts are at risk for many different health problems, with new infectious diseases being one of the biggest worries. In these places, people often get waterborne diarrhoeal diseases, acute respiratory infections, measles, tuberculosis, and vector-borne diseases like malaria. Skin infections are often ignored, but they can be very dangerous to your health, especially for children living in emergency shelters who have been forced to leave their homes.

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Received Date: February 03, 2026
Accepted Date: February 04, 2026
Published Date: February 20, 2026

Citation: V. Basil Hans. Infectious Illnesses in Areas of Violence and Among Refugees. International Journal of Tropical Medicines. 2026; 3(1): 36–40p.

HOW WAR MAKES DISEASES SPREAD

In crisis settings, the lack of access to water and sanitation, overcrowded camps, and inadequate housing, together with the breakdown of health services, all make it more likely that infectious diseases will spread [2]. The physical disruption

created by armed warfare contributes to this transmission. Diarrhoeal disease outbreaks happen days or weeks after people are moved from a safe site because of problems with water and sanitation, more surface water, and less access to safe supplies [1]. When individuals are forced to leave their homes because of war, vector-borne diseases, like malaria, tend to spread quickly. After three years, the immunity of people who have survived a fight starts to go down. The quick movement of people away from war zones and the fact that newly displaced people haven't been vaccinated against measles have been connected to epidemics of the disease in countries near areas of armed conflict.

COMMON DISEASES FOUND IN AREAS OF CONFLICT

War has made the health service situation worse, which makes health hazards in the area much worse. Iraq has been through a decade of war and international sanctions, and every year there are more than seventy outbreaks of communicable diseases. Since 1999, poliomyelitis, measles, and cholera have been the most common diseases that may be prevented by vaccines. The effects on people who are infected, society, the healthcare system, and the ability to get better are very bad. The situation has caused a lot of people to leave and go to nearby nations. This poses the same health risks to the refugees and makes the disease more likely to spread to other areas. Countries, like Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, need to get ready for further outbreaks of diseases that can be stopped by vaccines [3].

In Syria, infectious illness outbreaks are resurfacing alongside significant internal and external population displacements. Reports indicate that measles and hepatitis A have worsened due to significant disruptions in the immunisation program and inadequate access to fresh water. Cholera is a possible hazard since water and sanitation systems have been destroyed [1]. Because the health systems have broken down and so many people have been displaced by the war in the Middle East, it is very important to promote a minimum set of critical health services before bringing back full healthcare services.

OBSTACLES TO TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

After a fight breaks out, taking care of the injured is the most important thing to do, and stopping the spread of contagious diseases is less important. Still, there are a lot of faults that need to be fixed. Limited access to health resources makes it easier for infectious diseases to spread in both refugee camps and the places where displaced people have fled. Shortages, access problems, governance gaps, and bad supply chains are all things that make it hard to get care and avoid disease. When there aren't enough vaccines, antiseptics, and other basic supplies, outbreaks can happen. Stigma connected to diseases, like HIV and tuberculosis, makes it harder to get a diagnosis. Limitations on healthcare personnel and facilities, together with violence directed at medical practitioners, inhibit health-seeking behaviour in numerous regions and among various demographics. Insufficient clinical, epidemiological, and technical data hinder preventive strategies and customised interventions during outbreaks [1].

PROBLEMS WITH SURVEILLANCE AND DATA

There are a lot of concerns with surveillance in war zones. The armed situation in Syria has made it very hard for the country to keep track of diseases. The 2011 revolt and the government's harsh response to it caused the administration to stop using early warning systems and epidemiological instruments. Conflict, displacement, and instability made it even harder to respond to new cholera risk factors.

In times of war and emergency, it is still possible to track illness patterns using public health indicators including population estimates, nutritional status, and morbidity. This detective work needs clear, well-thought-out, detail-oriented indications and the help of many national and international authorities. Many programs do not explicitly focus on monitoring disease incidence, even as shortages, service urbanisation, and informal health care mean that disease surveillance needs close attention. The level of disruptions dictates the combination of indicators required to delineate health trends.

Providing health services in combat zones is hard. Compromised health infrastructure makes it hard to get basic public health information, even when there is peace. When access is limited, it becomes even harder to acquire data. Documented outbreaks suggest that circulatory illness can happen when public health, water services, and dispositional norms get a lot worse.

WAYS TO STOP AND CONTROL

Immunisation, better sanitation, and providing safe places for people to live all help stop the spread of disease in conflict zones. Providing clean water and good sanitation are two of the most important public health measures for lowering the spread of infectious diseases. Improvements in the safe water supply, such as treating the water, fixing boreholes and pipes, and finding new water sources, as well as giving people soap, not only lower the number of water-related diseases but also give people a chance to learn about good hygiene. Rehabilitating latrines and expanding drainage systems significantly impact disease prevalence; cleaning the containers utilised for excreta disposal constitutes a crucial targeted intervention. Immunisation protects kids from vaccine-preventable diseases that can be very serious, especially in places where there are a lot of sick and dead people. Even when access is limited to certain settlements or urban neighbourhoods, extra immunisation campaigns can still reach many kids. Shelter for displaced people protects them from the weather and keeps them safe from certain threats like physical violence, insect bites, and demolition by armed forces. Infants, small children, pregnant women, and elderly people are especially at risk. Easy-to-assemble and disassemble portable materials, like tarps and tents, make it possible to quickly find shelter. This is easier when there are local distributors of these materials [1].

HEALTH SYSTEMS AND HELP FOR THOSE IN NEED

During emergencies, health systems everywhere become stressed because all available resources are directed toward the disaster, and health facilities become overburdened. At every stage of the emergency cycle, humanitarian health organisations start working in the country or region. An outbreak assessment is done during the first stage of a disaster, and the need for fundamental health services that save lives is looked at. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Resident Coordinator usually organise most of the outside help that comes in during the first phase of an emergency. The World Health Organization (WHO) is mostly responsible for helping with epidemiological evaluations and health management systems, getting people access to important medicines, and getting vaccines for outbreaks and routine immunisations. Later, protective and mental difficulties become more important, which makes the time between the outbreak and the intervention longer.

One of the most essential life-saving services is getting vaccinated right now. vaccinations serve two crucial functions: routine immunisation to safeguard infants and adults, and response vaccinations during epidemics [1]. Regular vaccinations prevent kids from diseases, like measles and polio, and mothers protect their babies from tetanus. Outbreak and response vaccinations assist lower death rates and stop the spread of disease during epidemics. Countries that are already in a state of change, often where polio is common, start to have regular oral polio immunisation campaigns. It can be hard to keep track of people who are on the move, and many refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced people may not get help for a long time [4].

MENTAL HEALTH AND ITS CONNECTION TO PHYSICAL HEALTH

War and displacement severely damage the emotional health of refugees [5], which subsequently impacts their physical health [6]. They deal with anxiety, despair, grief or loss, post-traumatic stress disorder, somatization, and thoughts of hurting themselves. Many must move around a lot and don't know what will happen in the future. Stress levels rise, immune function declines, and susceptibility to infectious disease increases during war and displacement. Financial problems, trouble getting around, or fear of being judged make it harder to get mental and physical health care. So, any health response should include mental health care.

Interventions must be scalable, culturally relevant, and compatible with primary care delivery in conflict and post-conflict environments. The World Health Organization's "Problem Management Plus" intervention and the "Mental Health and Psychosocial Support" program, which has been changed for primary health-care centers, are two examples of recommended approaches.

VACCINATION AND REACH

Vaccination against diseases improves the health of those who have been forced to leave their homes such as refugees and returnees. More novel vaccines are being introduced in middle- and low-income countries, but many children still don't get vaccinated, get partial vaccinations, or get several doses of the same vaccine. Vaccination in emergencies is very important for stopping outbreaks and controlling diseases that spread easily. Refugee and internally displaced persons camps frequently provide routine vaccinations, particularly in conflict zones. Camps with medical facilities make it easier to give vaccinations, screen new arrivals, and give catch-up immunisations [7]. Despite safety and access concerns, vaccination teams work in conflict-affected areas and vaccination posts are set up at international border crossings in Nigeria and Pakistan.

GENDER AND GROUPS THAT ARE AT RISK

Conflict and relocation heighten health risks for vulnerable people, especially women, children, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and minority populations. Women are at a higher risk of getting HIV [8] and other sexually transmitted illnesses, especially during armed conflict when they experience even more stigma and prejudice. Women and teens may be at risk of sexual violence, trafficking, or exploitation in refugee camps. Kids and teens also have a higher chance of social, economic, and health problems. Families and communities have a hard time taking care of displaced children who have long-term diseases, impairments, or trauma. False information and stigma may discourage groups that need help from getting sexual and reproductive health care [9]. People with disabilities often have trouble getting around and finding places to stay, being alone, not having enough money, and getting information in an emergency. Current health interventions may neglect displaced individuals residing in informal settlements or camps, particularly in the initial stages of catastrophes. Because the health hazards that vulnerable groups face are very different from each other, leaders should utilise an inclusive strategy that takes the situation into account. They should work with community groups they trust to find out what people need and come up with interventions that are culturally acceptable and open to everyone. When choosing places to provide essential services or distribute help, such food or sanitary goods, there should be ways to report abuse and protect people.

ETHICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES

Humanitarian personnel dealing with health problems during complicated catastrophes and humanitarian disasters have tough moral choices to make about which lives to rescue or which diseases to treat first. Furthermore, even though the situation is urgent, getting informed permission for public health actions is still hard, especially when it comes to problems, like HIV/AIDS, that are very political. Even in the worst of times, the ideals of fairness, do-no-harm, and keeping data private must always come first. In these kinds of situations, limited finance and a string of disasters can make it hard to decide how to best use resources at both the donor and field levels, since there are so many competing demands. In addition to public health, social determinants of health (such as security) and the idea of safety are also relevant. The decision of which pandemic or sickness to address, or whether and to whom to refer, raises profound ethical dilemmas. The apparent dangers often make it hard to protect basic human rights and carry out health-related humanitarian operations. Involving forcibly displaced populations from polio-affected countries within a comprehensive humanitarian response framework can alleviate the political sensitivities associated with these operations, redirecting attention to the fundamental humanitarian justification for addressing disease in these groups [1, 10, 11].

RECENT CONFLICTS' CASE STUDIES

In Eastern Mediterranean countries including Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, there have been times of armed conflict both inside and outside the country. These conflicts have led to the return of communicable illnesses and public health problems that had been lessened or gotten rid of. These kinds of conflicts make it easier for vaccine-preventable diseases, like poliomyelitis, measles, and cholera, to spread quickly [3]. Conflict frequently disrupts health services and limits the mobility of individuals and materials, diminishing the supply of health commodities and elevating mortality from previously managed diseases [12]. After then, people may forget what they learned about how to avoid and treat

chronic diseases like asthma and diabetes. Fighting that goes on makes it harder to get food, water, and sanitation, which causes starvation, people moving about, and too many people living in temporary shelters. It also spreads cholera and other water-borne diseases [1]. Psychological discomfort rises, significantly impacting children and individuals with impairments.

CONCLUSION

Armed wars have a big effect on the transmission of infectious illnesses. Resources are used up, infrastructure falls apart, and health-promoting activities are stopped. The water supply has broken. People don't pay attention to hygiene and sanitation. Housing is not good enough for keeping a safe distance. People move around more when they can't get health care. The number of people getting vaccinated goes down. Infection-control methods fail. Epidemics that are already happening get worse. When systems are under a lot of stress, they are more likely to find new avenues for infections to spread and new viruses to enter.

Shortages of staff, money, supplies, and other basic needs make it harder to stop infections. Barriers to access, such as security hazards, distance, corruption, and competing objectives, make things worse for patients. When malnutrition is present along with other health problems, infectious illnesses thrive. Stigma makes things even harder. It's hard to take control when there isn't much information on threats and ways to protect yourself. The spread of a population impacts how outbreaks show up. Humanitarian approaches that take these difficulties into account will be better at stopping and controlling illnesses in circumstances when people are hosting or fleeing.

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