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Global Trends: Re-emergence of Treatable Infectious Diseases

In the early 1800s, the first recorded cholera outbreak emerged from the Ganges Delta, which was followed by its discovery in the late 1800s. Cholera had been identified as acute diarrheal disease, infecting the intestine.² Symptoms can often range from mild to severe, such as vomiting, irritability, leg cramps, and watery diarrhea, resulting in severe dehydration. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 10 people infected with cholera suffer from severe symptoms.² Cholera is commonly found in tropical regions such as Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Cholera is a treatable disease with affordable and effective treatments such as Oral Rehydration Solutions (ORS) or intravenous fluid replacement for severe cases.²

We are currently witnessing a re-emergence of cholera around the globe among vulnerable populations. On September 10, 2022, the Syrian government declared a cholera outbreak with nearly 77,500 suspected cases.¹ I have ranked this outbreak as having the greatest importance, as Syria is simultaneously facing the effects of multiple natural disasters, more recently the 7.8 magnitude earthquake, and a complex humanitarian crisis. Both have contributed to the cholera outbreak as civil unrest amongst the Syrian government and opposition groups have devastated the country's infrastructure. Homes have been demolished, health facilities have been damaged, and the limited humanitarian assistance has made it difficult to administer treatment to respond to the outbreak. Two action steps include the lifting of sanctions to increase humanitarian aid and assistance that is needed to respond to the disasters and crisis at hand and the reconstruction of water sanitation systems. The US announced a 180-day exemption to Syria sanctions for disaster aid to the northwest region. Aid is exclusively meant to support the earthquake relief effort. UNICEF has been committed to rehabilitating sanitation systems throughout the region.³ Due to the nature of the crisis and the limited humanitarian aid, it seems unlikely that a proper infrastructure for sanitation will be implemented in the near future.

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