

The Burundi government has announced that it is battling a cholera outbreak and has implemented preventative measures including a ban on handshakes and a requirement for every household to have a proper toilet that meets health standards.

According to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report last month, cholera was “spreading rapidly” in the Cibitoke area, with nearly 200 people hospitalized in the first two weeks of that month.

The government says that since the beginning of this year, more than 1,000 people have contracted cholera, with six deaths recorded. However, health observers believe the actual figures could be much higher than those officially reported.

A senior official at the Ministry of Health, quoted by local media in Burundi, stated that the number of cholera cases recorded in September was higher than in any single month over the past five years.

The Ministry of Health in Burundi has issued radio announcements educating the public on how to prevent cholera, which has been reported in Bujumbura the capital city and its surrounding areas.

The World Health Organization (WHO) office in Burundi recently announced that, due to the increasing number of cholera cases in Bujumbura and Cibitoke, it is helping to provide and set up tents at Prince Régent Charles Hospital in Bujumbura to ensure it can continue accommodating patients.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) reports that cholera infections across Africa are expected to exceed 300,000 by the end of this year, three times more than in 2022. The agency also says the current fatality rate stands at 2.1%, which is higher than expected.

Africa CDC notes that cholera cases have “risen rapidly in Burundi,” while in Chad, another affected country, aid delivery remains a major challenge in hard-hit areas. In Sudan, cases have decreased by 40%, but infections are still being reported.

To contain the spread, Bujumbura city authorities have warned residents against “selling cooked food along the streets,” and announced that anyone found discharging waste from toilets into drainage channels will face heavy penalties.

Reports all indicated that in recent days, hospitals have been overwhelmed with a

high number of people showing symptoms of cholera.

In a statement issued on Monday, the Governor of Bujumbura city, Aloys Ndayikengurukiye, said that every household “must ensure access to clean water and soap for handwashing.”

However, residents in the capital have long complained about the shortage of clean water supplied by REGIDESO, the national water and Electricity Company.

It was also revealed that some residents still lack proper toilets in their homes, forcing them to relieve themselves in open areas, according to local media reports.

Authorities said this waste often ends up in rivers, and because of the shortage of clean water, people draw water from those same rivers, contaminated with the cholera-causing bacteria.

In his Monday statement, the Governor of Bujumbura urged REGIDESO to “ensure water supply in the most affected areas, especially at public water points.”