

In a major step forward for cholera control, a global program led by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is deploying over 1.2 million rapid diagnostic tests to 14 high-risk countries.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this initiative aims to improve outbreak detection, response, and future prevention efforts.

Cholera cases have surged worldwide since 2021, straining resources and highlighting the need for improved surveillance. These rapid tests will allow health workers to quickly identify suspected cholera cases, enabling swifter outbreak response and more efficient allocation of limited vaccine supplies.

Researchers estimate that each year there are 1.3 to 4.0 million cases of cholera, and 21,000 to 143,000 deaths worldwide due to the infection. According to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Malawi became the first recipient of the rapid test kits, with Ethiopia, Somalia, Syria, and Zambia among the other countries slated for deliveries in the coming months. This large-scale deployment will significantly boost routine surveillance and testing capacity in these cholera-prone nations.

Experts emphasize that a multi-pronged approach is critical to the fight against cholera. While rapid tests will be crucial for early detection, ensuring access to clean water and sanitation remains a critical long-term strategy. Additionally, ongoing efforts to increase production of affordable vaccines are vital to bolster prevention efforts.

“Routine use of diagnostics will bolster cholera surveillance and must be leveraged to better target vaccination efforts,” said Aurélia Nguyen, Chief Programme Officer at Gavi.

“Surveillance diagnostics help pinpoint hotspots with great precision. This allows partners to target cholera vaccines to exactly the time and place where the limited supply will save the most lives,” said Leila Pakkala, Director of UNICEF Supply Division.

“WHO welcomes the deployment of these rapid cholera tests. They will equip health workers with the critical and timely data needed to stop outbreaks early and direct efforts to better prevent and treat cholera,” said Dr Michael Ryan, Executive

Director of WHO's Health Emergencies Programme.

This global deployment of rapid diagnostic tests marks a significant step towards controlling the current cholera surge. By improving detection, response, and targeting of resources, the program aims to save lives and prevent further outbreaks.