

UN Namibia assists in fight against Hepatitis E outbreak

20 February, Windhoek: UN Namibia, through UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO, is assisting the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) to fight the outbreak of Hepatitis E on the outskirts of the capital city, Windhoek.

More than 800 people are suspected of having contracted Hepatitis E while five people have died from the disease, which was first reported in October 2017.



H.E. the President Dr. Hage Geingob visiting Windhoek's Havana informal settlement with UN Country Team members. Emma Mbekele / UNFPA Namibia

The outbreak is concentrated in the informal settlements of Havana, Goreangab, Hakahana, Greenwell Matongo, Ombili and the broader Katutura, while the majority of the patients are from the informal settlements of Havana and Goreangab.

Hepatitis E is a liver disease spread by either direct contact with an infected person's faeces or by indirect fecal contamination of food or water. Infection is more severe among pregnant women as they are at greater risk of acute liver failure, fetal loss and mortality.

The outbreak is fueled mainly by lack of clean water, poor sanitation and poor personal hygiene. Since the outbreak, the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS) has carried out assessments in 2,500 households in the affected areas. The assessment revealed that 68% of households defecate in the open, 92% of them collect water from communal taps, 2% collect water from open/unsafe water sources, while 6% have household taps.

Namibian President H.E. Dr. Hage Geingob visited the affected areas in Havana informal settlement on 2 February 2017 and emphasised the importance of basic sanitation as Hepatitis E is not an inherit disease like cancer and other ailments, but spread through poor hygiene.

The President also urged communities to stop vandalizing public toilets and to take care of them as they belong to them.

To address the outbreak, UNFPA has pledged more than NAD 720,000 to train health and community workers, support community health education as well as the development of communication materials. UNICEF has provided technical support as well as 25,000 bar soaps and 50,000 packets of water purification tablets which are aimed toward water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities. WHO has provided technical support to surveillance, coordination and social mobilization taskforces, and engaging community leaders. **SDGs 3 'Health' and 6 'Sanitation'**