

Disease outbreak in Darfur camp

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An outbreak of Hepatitis E has killed at least 22 people in a camp for displaced people in the western Darfur region of Sudan, news reports said Thursday.

A doctor working for the U.N. population fund, Henia Dakkak, said the disease was spreading quickly due to poor sanitation in the camp, reported the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The doctor said pregnant women were most at risk, and described the situation as "alarming".

Hepatitis E occurs mainly by contamination of food and water, and epidemics normally happen after water supplies are contaminated with sewage after flooding.

She said more money was urgently needed from international donors so that the conditions could be improved. One of the most urgent measures is to chlorinate water to make it safe for drinking.

Dakkak echoed the concerns of other aid agencies, demanding Wednesday that western donors honour their promises to give money to help the humanitarian work going in Darfur.

British charity Oxfam, working particularly with water and sanitation interventions in Darfur, pointed at France, Italy, Spain and Japan, saying they had made substantial pledges to the humanitarian work in Darfur, but had so far given inadequately.

An Oxfam spokesman said he saw the reason as being mainly political.

"Funds were found overnight for humanitarian operations in places like Iraq", Oxfam's Adrian Macintyre told Deutsche Presse Agentur dpa on the phone from Nyala in southern Darfur.

"When there is a political interest in a place, there is always money available".

The U.N. in March appealed for 349 million dollars to help people affected by the violent conflict in Darfur. Less than half of that money has so far been put forward by donor nations.

"More funds for Darfur could have an immense impact for hundreds of thousands of people here", said Macintyre.

The situation in Darfur is labelled the world's worst humanitarian crisis by the U.N. An estimated 1.2 million people have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the 18-month conflict, and up to 50,000 people are believed to have died, from violence, starvation or disease.

As rains begun in Darfur last month, several areas have been flooded. Still water in the camps, where both animal and human waste floats around, becomes a breeding ground for disease.

According to Oxfam, there is a serious concern about a possible cholera outbreak in Kalma camp in southern Darfur, where 70,000 displaced people live.

"We work around the clock to dig latrines and provide clean drinking water. We are doing what we can to prevent outbreaks of disease", said Macintyre.

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