

When cholera is not cholera

3rd, EEHF, 3-4th May, Delft, Netherlands

When is cholera not cholera?

When...

- A Government is reluctant to declare it
- The World Health Organisation has no authority (or willingness) to declare
- Humanitarian actors decide that humanitarian space to respond on the ground is more important than the declaration in itself

Implications

Harder to...

- Get the outbreak taken seriously – in the general population, by Govt, by donors, within the UN, by NGOs
- Coordinate the various sectors
- Maintain momentum (if attained initially)

Less...

- Funding & trained personnel available
- Visible in humanitarian dialogue and documentation → more likely to 'disappear'
- Able to use the media → harder to spread the life saving messages

→ Longer time lag, harder to contain, easier to spread & risk to life

Why discuss?

- Increasingly governments - choosing not to declare cholera
- Cholera - same effects & kills no matter what it is called
- Cross-border issue - does not only affect the country of concern
- Poorest people often most affected - no power to challenge the politics around whether the 'c' word is used

Recommendations

...when cholera is not cholera

Options -

1. International health legislation - WHO must be given the authority & the duty to declare cholera

New IHR 2005 – WHO DG has authority to share info if 'public health emergency of international concern' (& if States sign up to the new IHR)**

... but will action be compromised in sensitive situations by no explicit duty?

2. International health regulations - change to:

The precautionary approach for cholera

Assume 'AWD' is cholera & Governments to have the legal right to prove it isn't

3. All actors to respond to 'AWD' in exactly same way as cholera – urgency, sector funds available immediately, increase CL staffing

Donors – put declaration of health outbreaks on the good governance development agenda

**Ref: Fidler, D, 2005, 'From International Sanitary Conventions to Global Health Security: The New International Health Regulations'