

# The Republic of South Sudan



## Ministry of Health *Office of the Undersecretary*

PRESS STATEMENT  
JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN

26<sup>th</sup> September 2023

**SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF HEALTH STATEMENT ON DECLARATION OF HEPATITIS E VIRUS (HEV) DISEASE OUTBREAK IN FANGAK, JONGLEI STATE AND GREATER PIBOR ADMINISTRATIVE AREA (GPAA).**

The Ministry of Health (MOH) would like to inform the general public that there is an outbreak of Hepatitis E Virus in Fangak, Jonglei State and GPAA.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023, the Ministry of Health received a notification from World Relief regarding an increase in cases of Hepatitis E infection. Thirteen (13) blood samples were collected by MSF-France and submitted to the National Public Health Laboratory for testing. **Three (03) out of the thirteen (13) blood samples tested positive (23.1% positivity rate) for HEV on Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing. One sample was also received by the NPHL from Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) and the sample also tested positive for HEV (100% positivity rate).**

As of 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023, a cumulative total of 63 cases with symptoms and signs consistent with HEV disease and 12 deaths (Case Fatality Rate: 19%) were reported from Fangak. Most cases (36.5%) are from the village of Old Fangak. The median age group affected is 33 years (Interquartile range: 2 – 59). Males are the most affected accounting for 58.7% of all reported cases. **It is worth noting that out of the 12 recorded deaths, 8 (CFR: 66.7%) were recorded among women of reproductive age group with median age of 24.5 years (IQR: 20 – 30).**

Hepatitis E is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis E virus (HEV). HEV is found in the stool of an infected person; it is usually spread by the fecal-oral route, and the most common source of HEV infection is contaminated drinking water.

Typical signs and symptoms of hepatitis include:

- an initial phase of mild fever, reduced appetite (anorexia), nausea and vomiting lasting for a few days;
- abdominal pain, itching, skin rash, or joint pain;
- jaundice (yellow colour of the skin), dark urine and pale stools; and
- a slightly enlarged, tender liver (hepatomegaly).



Based on the confirmation of HEV by PCR and the risk of spread to other geographical areas, the Ministry of Health hereby declares an outbreak of HEV disease outbreak in Fangak and GPAA and immediately puts in place the following response actions;

- Immediately activate the Public Health Emergency Operations Center to Response mode and all response pillars (coordination, surveillance, case management, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)/ Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Risk Communication and Community Engagement, RCCE), safe and dignified burial, Points of Entry (PoE), and logistics.
- Deploy a multi-disciplinary Rapid Response Team (RRT) to conduct further epidemiological investigation, collect and ship additional samples to the NPHL, line list case patients and characterize the case patients according time, place and person, identify the source of infection, risk/exposure factors and put in place control and prevention measures.
- Develop a response plan to mobilize the needed resources and guide response interventions.

The Ministry of Health will continue to work with WHO and partners to ensure response efforts are fully implemented and the people of South Sudan are protected from the risk of HEV. The public is encouraged to observe the following public health measures to prevent HEV transmission:

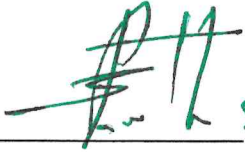
1. Drink and use water that has been made safe after treating with chlorine or water that has been boiled until it bubbles (allow boiled water to cool on its own without adding ice).
2. Always wash your hands with soap and safe water after using the toilet/latrines, after cleaning a soiled child/baby, before eating, before feeding a child and after taking care and touching a HEV infected patient.
3. Use latrines to defecate. Do not defecate in or near a source of drinking water (stream, river or water hole).
4. Cook food well and always wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly with clean and safe water before eating them.
5. Keep a clean environment at home and in public places and ensure safe disposal of liquid and solid waste.

We urge the public not to **panic** but remain **calm** and observe all the precautionary measures mentioned above to prevent community transmission and high risk and vulnerable populations (schools, Universities, prisons, IDP/Refugee camps etc).

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The Public is further urged to be vigilant and report all suspected HEV cases to the national outbreak hotline 6666 or the nearest health facility, County Health Department, and/or State Ministry of Health.

 27/09/23

for

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