Correspondence

Infectious diseases amidst a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine: A rising concern

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords
Infectious diseases
War
Healthcare
Ukraine

ABSTRACT

As of the 24th of February 2022, the war in Ukraine has increased the risk for infectious diseases outbreaks in the country and beyond. The disruption of healthcare services, the destruction of critical infrastructure, the displacement of millions of civilians and the crowded living conditions in bunkers pose a formidable threat to public health. Infections are emphasized due to the low rates of vaccination against COVID-19 and the high prevalence of chronic infections such as Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS in Ukraine compared to the WHO Europe region. Collaboration between authorities and humanitarian organizations is necessary, in order to strengthen epidemiological surveillance and deploy vital resources that are required for the prevention and the management of infections.

Measles outbreaks could surge in Ukraine, a common outcome from conflict settings where routine healthcare is hindered and vaccination campaigns stall, or stop altogether. [7]. A large and prolonged outbreak of >115,000 measles cases occurred in Ukraine across 2017–2020. [1]. Ukraine, bears the second highest burden of HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe, with 1% prevalence across the general population, 21% prevalence in injecting-drug users and 7.5% in men who have sex with men [1]. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) has become scarce during the current crisis. High-risk behaviours, such as unsafe sex and risky drug injection practices, may also increase and thus increases the risk for new HIV infections [8].

Conclusion

Overall, the unfolding crisis in Ukraine poses a risk for infectious outbreaks, and this is amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Ukraine health system is struggling to provide acute trauma care and also remain accessible for people in acute need of medical attention. All authorities and humanitarian organizations should continue monitoring the situation with displaced and refugee populations, and identify how best to target deployment of medicines, vaccinations and other vital resources. The military and political developments of the crisis may divert attention from health challenges; hence, it is crucial to ensure that infectious diseases are addressed, and do not become a forgotten burden of disease. The consequences of this would last for many years.

Ethical approval

N/A.

Source of funding

None.
Author contribution

Mohammad Yasir Essar conceived the concept of the paper. Mohammad Yasir Essar, Lolita Matiashova, and Christos Tsagkaris wrote the first draft. Valeriia Vladychuk and Michael Head edited the second draft. All authors read and approved the final draft.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

Trial registry number

1. Name of the registry: N/A.
2. Unique Identifying number or registration ID: N/A.
3. Hyperlink to your specific registration (must be publicly accessible and will be checked): N/A.

Guarantor

N/A.

Consent

N/A.

Acknowledgements

None.

References

[1] Surge of HIV, tuberculosis and COVID feared amid war in Ukraine [Internet]. [cited, Available from, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00748-6, 2022 Apr 19.
[2] Children growing up in conflict zones in Ukraine and beyond need urgent mental health support [Internet]. [cited, Lancet 399 (2022 Apr 19) 1689–1690. Available from, https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)00579-2/fulltext#%20.
[3] [Internet], Ukraine’s Tuberculosis Progress ‘Stopped in One Day’ after Russia Invasion, The Straits Times, 2022 Mar 23 [cited 2022 Apr 19]; Available from, https://www.straitstimes.com/world/ukraines-tuberculosis-progress-stopped-in-one-day-after-russia-invasion.
[4] World Tuberculosis Day: supporting Ukraine in scaling up TB diagnosis and treatment [Internet], [cited, Available from, https://www.euro.who.int/en/countries/ukraine/news/news/2021/3/world-tuberculosis-day-supporting-ukraine-in-scaling-up-tb-diagnosis-and-treatment, 2022 Apr 19.
[5] E. Holt, Tuberculosis services disrupted by war in Ukraine [Internet], Lancet Infect. Dis. (2022 Mar 23) [cited 2022 Apr 19];0(0), Available from, https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancinf/article/PIIS1473-3099(22)00214-6/fulltext#%20.
[6] [Internet], [cited, GPEI Deeply Concerned for Health of Ukrainian People amid Escalating Crisis, ReliefWeb, Ukraine, 2022 Apr 20. Available from, https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/gpei-deeply-concerned-health-ukrainian-people-amid-escalating-crisis,
[7] Z. Islam, Z.H. Tharwani, M.S. Butt, S.K. Shaeen, M.S. Anhad, M.A. Khalid, et al., Measles in Afghan refugees: challenges, efforts and recommendations, Clin. Epidemiol. Global Health 14 (2022 Mar 1), 100980.
[8] ‘Bureaucracy & Beliefs’: assessing the barriers to accessing opioid substitution therapy by people who inject drugs in Ukraine [Internet]. [cited, Drugs Educ. Prev. Pol. 22 (3) (2022 Apr 20). Available from, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3109/09687637.2015.1016397?journalCode=idep20.

Mohammad Yasir Essar*
Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Kabul, Afghanistan
Clinical Informatics Research Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom

Lolita Matiashova
T Malaya Therapy National Institute, National Academy of Medical Sciences of Ukraine, Kharkiv 61039, Ukraine

Christos Tsagkaris
European Student Think Tank, Public Health and Policy Working Group, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Valeriia Vladychuk
Bogomolets National Medical University, Tarasa Shevchenko Blvd, 13, 01601, Kyiv, Ukraine

Michael Head
Clinical Informatics Research Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: yasir.essar@gmail.com (M.Y. Essar).