

Summary of the situation in the Americas

As of epidemiological week (EW) 23 of 2017, five countries and territories of the Americas have reported outbreaks of conjunctivitis: Bahamas, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, and Martinique.

In the **Bahamas**,¹ between May and June 2017, there was an increase in the number of cases of conjunctivitis. A total of 240 cases were reported compared to the 187 cases reported during the same period in 2016. Public health measures needed to control the situation have been implemented by the competent health authorities.

In **Brazil**,² an outbreak of conjunctivitis was reported in the municipality of Humaitá, Amazonas state, with 172 cases being registered between 18 May and 6 June 2017. Local health authorities are implementing prevention and control measures to end the outbreak.

In the **Dominican Republic**,³ as of EW 21 of 2017, a total of 66,626 cases of conjunctivitis were reported, representing a 62% increase compared with the same period of 2016 (41,022 reported cases). The conjunctivitis outbreak began on EW 18 of 2017 and is ongoing. Between EW 18 and EW 21, the provinces of Distrito Nacional, San Cristóbal, Santiago, and Santo Domingo reported the highest increases in the number of cases.

In **Guadeloupe**,⁴ an increase in cases of conjunctivitis above the epidemic threshold level has been observed since the end of 2016. Between EW 20 and EW 21 of 2017, the weekly number of suspected cases increased significantly, with 500 to 600 cases being reported and a cumulative incidence of 20 cases for 10,000 population (eight times higher than the number of cases expected for this time of the year). Across the territory, the commune of Grand Bourg reported the highest incidence, with 353 cases per 10,000 population, followed by Le Gosier, Pointe-à-Pitre, and Terre-de-Bas, with an incidence between 50 and 100 cases per 10,000 population. Laboratory tests performed on a set of samples from suspected cases were positive for enteroviruses.

In **Martinique**,⁴ the number of cases of conjunctivitis increased significantly in EW 20 of 2017, when 250 suspected cases were reported weekly. Between EW 20 and EW 21, the cumulative incidence was 10 cases per 10,000 population. The communes of Marin and François reported the highest incidence rates with 41 and 35 cases per 10,000 population, respectively.

Outbreaks of conjunctivitis in other countries of the Region are under investigation.

Recommendations

In light of the increased transmission of conjunctivitis in some countries and territories of the Region, the Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO / WHO) encourages Member states to strengthen surveillance and implement control measures to prevent the spread of the disease.

The following are the main recommendations related to surveillance, prevention, and management of contacts and treatment of patients.

Surveillance and epidemiological investigation

- Enhance surveillance for the timely detection of outbreaks, to adequately guide control measures.
- Promptly notify health authorities on the detection of an outbreak.
- Investigate contacts and sources of infection, and determine if there has been a common source of infection.
- Strengthen laboratory capacity for confirmation of diagnosis.
- Disseminate information and recommendations to health care workers.

Prevention, management of contacts and immediate environment

- Promote hand washing as well as meticulous cleaning and handling of any object that may come into contact with eye or respiratory secretions.
- Ensure the cleanliness of conjunctival exudates.
- Conduct health education campaigns for cases and contacts in order to avoid overcrowding and promote hygienic measures; instruct on the need to avoid touching eyes with hands or any object, and to frequently wash hands. Patients should not share any utensils and personal belongings with the rest of their families.
- Properly chlorinate pools.
- Organize diagnostic and case management services.
- Ensure adherence to asepsis and antisepsis standards in health care settings.

For health care workers

- Always wear gloves and gowns for patient care and use personal protective measures.
- Wash hands after providing care to an individual with probable or laboratory-confirmed conjunctivitis.
- Disinfect furniture and medical equipment to avoid contamination of other patients and / or staff.

Case management

- The management of conjunctivitis is symptomatic and should be limited to general measures, such as cold compresses and artificial tears with vasoconstrictors.
- Antimicrobial agents should not be indicated, unless there is an aggregated microbial infection. The effectiveness of antivirals has also not been documented.
- Steroidal anti-inflammatory medications should not be used as they significantly increase viral replication. Eye drops containing antibiotics should not be used.
- Isolation should be used to limit contact with cases during the active period of the disease; take precautions regarding exudates and secretions. Restrict contact with cases while the disease is active.

References

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