
The health situation in Iraq is bleak

The WHO press office issued the following update on April 16.

A team from WHO has conducted a preliminary assessment of health facilities in the northern town of Mosul, in Ninawa Governorate. They report that the main hospitals in the town have been partially looted, and are operating at about 50% capacity. Most of the health centres in Mosul are also reported

to have been looted and burnt, as have the Department of Health offices and at least some of their warehouse facilities.

WHO is working with local health authorities in the three Northern Governorates to support health facilities in Kirkuk. They have agreed to move emergency supplies to Kirkuk to meet some of the urgent needs identified during the last few days. WHO is also working to find ways to provide urgently needed financial support to keep the health system in Kirkuk working.

The situation in Baghdad continues to be a source of major concern. The Central Public Health Laboratory has been looted, and incubators containing polioviruses have been stolen. There have also been reports from elsewhere in Iraq of virus cultures being stolen. This is very unlikely to cause disease, but is a serious concern because these cultures are vital for research and public health work.

Hospitals in Baghdad which are reported to be functioning to some extent include the Medical City complex of four hospitals, and Yarmouk, Kadhimiya and No'man hospitals. WHO staff will continue to visit the major hospitals in the city in order to assess, prioritize and meet the most urgent needs.

Contact with WHO staff in Baghdad has been restored and their news is bleak. The WHO office in Baghdad has been very badly looted and burnt. All the official vehicles have been stolen from the compound and much valuable equipment and information has been destroyed.

On 29 March WHO appealed urgently for US\$ 185 million to meet immediate health needs — 60 million for medicines and other medical supplies and equipment, and 125 million on building minimum capacity to respond to outbreaks and everyday needs, and on rehabilitating hospitals and health centres.

Daily updates on the health situation in Iraq can be found at www.who.int.