

General Country Information:

The Republic of Sierra Leone is located in western Africa, and borders Guinea and Liberia with a coast along the Atlantic Ocean. Sierra Leone is divided in three provinces and one area further subdivided into 12 districts. Freetown, the capital, is also the largest city.

Sierra Leone became a British colony in 1808 and gained its independence in April 1961. In 1992, a coup launched by military officers was the start of a civil war fueled by the fight between international mining companies over the control of Sierra Leone's diamonds. The conflict was to end only in 2002.

A high number of UN peacekeepers troops were deployed (13,000) and an estimated 50,000 people died in the conflict. 250,000 people were internally displaced (last IDP camp was closed in 2003).

Despite those long years of civil war, Sierra Leone is showing signs of a successful economical transition and foreign direct investment keep growing. However unemployment rates are still high among ex-combatants and 70% of the population still lives under the poverty line. In 2009 Sierra Leone is ranked 179 out of 179 countries in the UN Human Development Index (HDI). Life expectancy is currently 40 years, the 8th worst in the world, and Sierra Leone has the highest maternal mortality ratio and child mortality rates in the world. The healthcare system was largely destroyed in the war along with much of the other vital infrastructure. Now the Sierra Leonese government is struggling to improve facilities - many of which were burnt down or destroyed.

Sierra Leone reported outbreaks of Lassa Fever in 2004 and yellow fever in 2003.

Cholera Background History:

Sierra Leone first reported cholera cases in 1970 and 1971 when the current pandemic hit the African continent. The number of cases were respectively 293 and 211 but the case fatality rates (CFR) remained high: 25% and 6%.

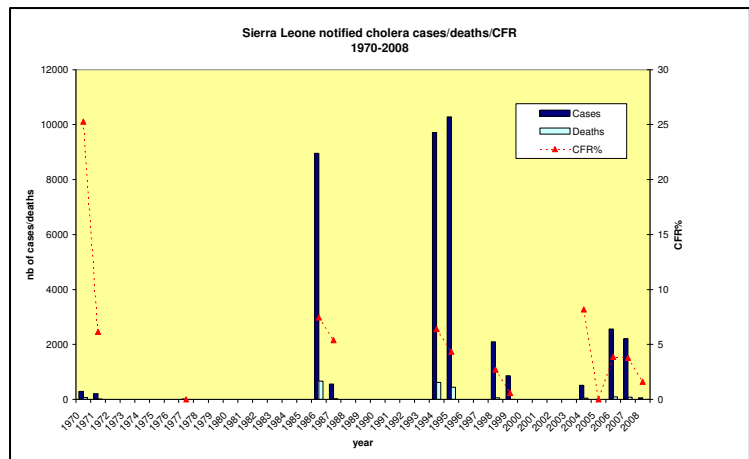
The next cases were reported in 1986 and 1987 with CFRs of 7% and 5%, followed by the years 1994 and 1995 with CFRs of 6% and 4%.

In 1998, Sierra Leone notified 2096 cases and 57 deaths (CFR 2.7%). The outbreak started in July and affected 3 districts: Freetown, Port Loko and Kambia.

In 1999, Sierra Leone notified 863 cases with 5 deaths (CFR 0.6%) starting in September.

Between 2 and 29 of August 2004, an outbreak affecting 513, with 42 deaths (CFR 8.2%) occurred in the districts of Western Area, Port Loko and Kambia.

The outbreaks often occur during the rainy season (from May to October) related to heavy rains which cause flooding and contamination of water sources.



Cholera Outbreak in 2006:

The outbreak in Sierra Leone started on 20 August 2006 in Freetown (Western area). It quickly spread to the rural Western area and four other districts (Kambia, Tonkolili, Port Loko and Kailahun). The peak of the outbreak was reached at the end of September 2006 with a daily incidence of 367 cases (see epicurve). As of October 2006, the total number of cases reported was 2'560 and 99 deaths with an overall case fatality rate of 3.8%.

2007 and 2008:

In 2007, Sierra Leone reported 2'219 including 84 deaths (CFR of 3.79%) affecting 11 out of 13 districts. (see Map) In 2008, Sierra Leone reported 62 cases (incl. 1 death) giving a CFR of 1.6%.

