

Cyclone, monsoon seasons threaten half a million Rohingya children in overcrowded camps – UNICEF

16 January 2018 – As the Bay of Bengal region gears up for cyclone and monsoon seasons, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) is warning that more than 500,000 Rohingya children already living in “horrific” conditions in makeshift settlements in Bangladesh may face compounded risks of disease and displacement.

“What is already a [dire humanitarian situation risks becoming a catastrophe](#),” Edouard Beigbeder, the head of UNICEF programmes in Bangladesh said Tuesday, warning on the impact of the approaching cyclone and monsoon seasons.

“Hundreds of thousands of children are already living in horrific conditions, and they will face an even greater risk of disease, flooding, landslides and further displacement,” he added.

More than 4,000 suspected cases of diphtheria have been reported among the refugees – with 32 deaths, including at least 24 children.

UNICEF and partners have launched a diphtheria vaccination campaign, and are working to provide access to safe water and sanitation facilities, but overcrowding and the growing risk of extreme weather increases the risk of further outbreaks.

“Unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene conditions can lead to cholera outbreaks and to Hepatitis E, a deadly disease for pregnant women and their babies, while standing water pools can attract malaria-carrying mosquitos. Keeping children safe from disease must be an absolute priority,” Mr. Beigbeder added.

In addition to the increased threat of disease outbreaks, cyclones can cause flooding and landslides. With little time to prepare before the cyclone season begins in March, even a moderate storm could have a devastating impact.

Tropical cyclones generally strike Bangladesh from March through July, and September through December – with the greatest number of storms arriving in May and October.

In May 2017, Cyclone Mora caused widespread damage when it barrelled through the region, including destroying some 25 per cent of Rohingya refugee camp shelters.

Additionally, June monsoons threaten landslides and floods, which may also render severe damage on shelters, water systems, latrines and other infrastructure.

Since 25 August, widespread violence in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state has forced over 650,000 members of the Rohingya community to flee their homes and seek shelter across the border in Bangladesh. A number of UN agencies, together with humanitarian partners and the Bangladesh Government have been providing them with life-saving support.