

**UPDATE / ADVISORY – COMMUNICABLE DISEASE RISKS  
AFGHANISTAN REFUGEES**

**Date: January 14, 2022**

**Issue**

- The Government of Canada has alerted BC that a charter flight from Pakistan with approximately 252 Afghan refugees is scheduled to arrive in Vancouver on January 18, 2022.
- Upon arrival, the refugees will be quarantined under federal government supervision in Greater Vancouver (Vancouver/Surrey/Richmond).
- The final settlement destination for the refugees within Canada is unknown at this time.
- **This updated advisory supports clinicians in their awareness and management of potential communicable disease issues among the individuals arriving from Afghanistan.**

**Recommendations**

- Clinicians should be aware of and take appropriate steps to address potential communicable diseases among the Afghan refugees, including:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• COVID-19</li><li>• Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF)</li><li>• Cryptosporidiosis</li><li>• Giardiasis</li><li>• Hepatitis A</li><li>• Hepatitis E (HEV)</li><li>• Leishmaniasis</li><li>• Malaria</li><li>• Measles</li><li>• Mumps</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Polio</li><li>• Rotavirus</li><li>• Schistosomiasis</li><li>• Soil-transmitted helminthiases (STH)</li><li>• Shigellosis</li><li>• Tetanus</li><li>• Tuberculosis</li><li>• Varicella</li><li>• Viral diarrheal diseases</li></ul>
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- Please see Appendix A for additional information on signs and symptoms, notes, and resources for the aforementioned diseases.
- On September 20, 2021, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) issued an alert for cases of measles, mumps, leishmaniasis and malaria among evacuees from Afghanistan.
  - There have been 16 confirmed cases of measles and 4 cases of mumps among Afghan nationals and U.S. citizens arriving from Afghanistan.
  - Additional measles infections among evacuees are anticipated, based on ongoing transmission and low vaccine coverage (approximately 60%) in Afghanistan.
  - The US CDC is also aware of some cases of varicella, mumps, tuberculosis, malaria, leishmaniasis, hepatitis A and COVID-19 among evacuees.
  - To date, the COVID incidence in this population has been notably low.
- Measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis, polio, tetanus, tuberculosis, giardiasis, cryptosporidiosis and malaria are reportable diseases in BC. Clinicians need to follow existing processes for notifying public health. Consult the BC Communicable Disease Manual for further instruction and guidance.

- List of reportable diseases in BC:  
[www.bccdc.ca/Documents/BC%20Reportable%20Disease%20List.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/BC%20Reportable%20Disease%20List.pdf)
- BC Communicable Disease Manual: [www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/communicable-disease-control-manual](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/communicable-disease-control-manual)
- Case reporting forms are available at: [www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/surveillance-forms](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/surveillance-forms)
- Clinicians should provide evacuees and those supporting resettlement with a list of symptoms to look out for and ask them to alert their health-care provider (e.g., by phone) if symptoms develop.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada has COVID-19 information available in multiple languages: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/awareness-resources.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/awareness-resources.html)
- When required, transport of patients with suspected or confirmed illness to health care settings must be preceded by notification of BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) and the receiving facility to ensure appropriate precautions are in place.

**Immunization:**

- Clinicians should review an evacuee's entire vaccination history and recommend any missing vaccines, including the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), varicella, polio, COVID-19, hepatitis A, and seasonal influenza vaccines.
- Individuals supporting the resettlement effort should ideally be vaccinated against hepatitis A, in addition to being current on routine immunizations.
- In BC, hepatitis A vaccine is recommended and provided free to people at high risk of infection. This includes those in close contact with someone infected by hepatitis A and those who may have been exposed to hepatitis A.

Sincerely,



Dr. Martin Lavoie  
Deputy Provincial Health Officer  
Office of the Provincial Health Officer

**Appendix A: Clinical Resources - Communicable Diseases Known to Impact People from Afghanistan**

Communicable Disease	Signs and Symptoms	Resources
<b>COVID-19</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New or worsening cough</li> <li>• Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing</li> <li>• Temperature equal to or more than 38°C</li> <li>• Feeling feverish</li> <li>• Sore throat</li> <li>• Chills</li> <li>• Fatigue or weakness</li> <li>• Muscle or body aches</li> <li>• New loss of smell or taste</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Abdominal pain, diarrhea and/or vomiting</li> <li>• Feeling very unwell</li> <li>• <i>Note: Symptoms of COVID-19 can vary from person to person, in different age groups and depending on the COVID-19 variant. About 6.1% of the population in Afghanistan have had a COVID-19 vaccination.</i></li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/symptoms">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/symptoms</a></p> <p><a href="https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/afghanistan/">https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/afghanistan/</a></p>
<b>Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever (high)</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Back and/or joint pain</li> <li>• Abdominal pain</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Red throat and petechiae (red spots) on palate</li> <li>• Red eyes and flushed face</li> </ul> <p>Progressed illness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe bruising</li> <li>• Nosebleeds</li> <li>• Uncontrollable bleeding at injection sites</li> <li>• <i>Note: CCHF is a tick-borne virus that is increasing in Afghanistan, with a majority presenting to the hospital in the late phase of infection. CCHF can be transmitted from one infected person to another by contact with infectious blood or body fluids.</i></li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/laboratory-biosafety-biosecurity/pathogen-safety-data-sheets-risk-assessment/crimean-congo-haemorrhagic-fever-virus.html">www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/laboratory-biosafety-biosecurity/pathogen-safety-data-sheets-risk-assessment/crimean-congo-haemorrhagic-fever-virus.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/crimean-congo/symptoms/index.html">www.cdc.gov/vhf/crimean-congo/symptoms/index.html</a></p>
<b>Cryptosporidiosis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watery diarrhea (most common)</li> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• Dehydration</li> <li>• Stomach cramps or pain</li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/cryptosporidiosis.html">www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/cryptosporidiosis.html</a></p>

Communicable Disease	Signs and Symptoms	Resources
<b>Giardiasis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gas</li> <li>• Diarrhea</li> <li>• Dehydration</li> <li>• Abdominal cramps</li> <li>• Nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• <i>Note: Children up to 9 years old are most at risk. Most of the infections occur in the summer months.</i></li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/giardia-infection/health-professionals.html">www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/giardia-infection/health-professionals.html</a>
<b>Hepatitis A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Malaise and/or tiredness (similar to the flu)</li> <li>• Loss of appetite and/or vomiting</li> <li>• Dark urine and/or pale feces</li> <li>• Sore feeling in upper-right stomach area</li> <li>• Jaundice</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/hepatitis-a">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/hepatitis-a</a>
<b>Hepatitis E (HEV)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Abdominal pain and tenderness</li> <li>• Nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• Loss of appetite</li> <li>• Diarrhea</li> <li>• Dark urine and/or pale feces</li> <li>• Jaundice (in some cases)</li> <li>• <i>Note: HEV is highly endemic in Afghanistan.</i></li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/hepatitis-e">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/hepatitis-e</a>
<b>Leishmaniasis</b>	<p>Cutaneous leishmaniasis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sores on skin – scabs or ulcers (painful or painless)</li> <li>• Swollen lymph nodes near sores</li> </ul> <p>Mucocutaneous leishmaniasis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of “stuffed up” nose, frequent nose bleeds</li> <li>• Mouth or nose sores</li> <li>• Severe disfiguration of the face</li> </ul> <p>Visceral leishmaniasis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Weight loss</li> <li>• Hepatosplenomegaly (liver and spleen enlargement)</li> <li>• Blood abnormalities (e.g., anemia, low white blood cell count)</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/leishmaniasis.html">www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/leishmaniasis.html</a>
<b>Malaria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Chills</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Nausea</li> <li>• Sweating as the fever subsides</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/malaria">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/malaria</a>

Communicable Disease	Signs and Symptoms	Resources
<b>Measles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever, cough, runny nose, and watery inflamed eyes</li> <li>• Small red spots in the mouth with white or bluish white centers</li> <li>• Dusky red, blotchy rash that begins on the face and spreads all over the body</li> <li>• Rash that begins on third to seventh day of illness and lasts four to seven days</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/measles">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/measles</a>
<b>Mumps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Swollen and painful salivary glands</li> <li>• Swollen and painful testicles/ovaries</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/mumps">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/mumps</a>
<b>Polio</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Tiredness</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Nausea and vomiting</li> <li>• Severe muscle pain and spasms</li> <li>• Stiffness of the neck and back</li> <li>• Weakness of one or more arms or legs</li> <li>• Paralysis of the face and neck</li> <li>• Paralysis of breathing muscles</li> <li>• <i>Note: Afghanistan is one of two countries in the world where wild poliovirus remains endemic.</i></li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/polio">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/polio</a>  <a href="https://polioeradication.org/where-we-work/afghanistan/">https://polioeradication.org/where-we-work/afghanistan/</a>
<b>Rotavirus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Stomach pain</li> <li>• Diarrhea (which lasts from 3 to 8 days)</li> <li>• <i>Note: Most children experience rotavirus for the first time at an early age. Children who are less than 4 months old usually suffer from mild symptoms. Symptoms are most severe in children between 4 and 24 months old. Children from 4 months to 5 years in age can suffer from mild diarrhea and severe dehydration if left untreated.</i></li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/rotavirus/symptoms.html">www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/rotavirus/symptoms.html</a>
<b>Schistosomiasis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually, asymptomatic</li> <li>• Local cutaneous hypersensitivity following skin penetration, may appear as small itchy maculopapular lesions</li> </ul> <p>Heavy infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Abdominal pain</li> <li>• Diarrhea</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/laboratory-biosafety-biosecurity/pathogen-safety-data-sheets-risk-assessment/schistosoma-pathogen-safety-data-sheet.html">www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/laboratory-biosafety-biosecurity/pathogen-safety-data-sheets-risk-assessment/schistosoma-pathogen-safety-data-sheet.html</a>

Communicable Disease	Signs and Symptoms	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hepatosplenomegaly (liver and spleen enlargement)</li> <li>• Eosinophilia</li> <li>• <i>Note: Schistosomiasis continues to be problematic in rural and urban areas of Afghanistan.</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Soil-transmitted helminthiases (STH)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually asymptomatic presentation.</li> </ul> <p>Heavy infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abdominal pain</li> <li>• Diarrhea</li> <li>• Blood and protein loss</li> <li>• Rectal prolapse</li> <li>• Physical and cognitive growth impairment</li> <li>• <i>Note: STH continues to be problematic in rural and urban areas of Afghanistan.</i></li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/sth/">www.cdc.gov/parasites/sth/</a>
<b>Shigellosis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• Abdominal pains</li> <li>• Stomach cramps</li> <li>• Diarrhea (watery and often bloody)</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/shigella/symptoms.html">www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/shigella/symptoms.html</a>
<b>Tetanus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muscle spasms in jaw, difficulty opening mouth (“lockjaw”)</li> <li>• Difficulty swallowing or breathing</li> <li>• Seizures</li> <li>• <i>Note: Tetanus prevalence is high in Afghanistan and an important cause of maternal and neonatal mortality.</i></li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/tetanus">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/tetanus</a>
<b>Tuberculosis (TB)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fevers, chills and night sweats</li> <li>• Loss of appetite (not hungry) and unexplained weight loss</li> <li>• Weakness or feeling very tired</li> <li>• <i>Note: Signs/symptoms of active TB depend on where in the body TB is located. They can begin gradually and worsen over time.</i></li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/tuberculosis">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/tuberculosis</a>
<b>Varicella</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever and feeling tired before a rash develops.</li> <li>• Small, red, flat spots that usually first appear on stomach, back, face, and scalp and then spread to the rest of the body</li> <li>• Spots develop into fluid-filled blisters which are usually less than a quarter inch wide and have a red base</li> <li>• After the blisters break, the open sores will become covered by dry, brown scabs</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/chickenpox-varicella">www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/chickenpox-varicella</a>

Communicable Disease	Signs and Symptoms	Resources
<b>Viral Diarrheal Diseases</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="451 258 1057 426">• <u>Note</u>: Infectious diarrhea is caused by a variety of pathogens. In children, most moderate to severe cases are attributable to 4 pathogens: rotavirus, Cryptosporidium, enterotoxigenic E. coli, and Shigella.</li> </ul>	<a href="https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2021/han00452.asp">https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2021/han00452.asp</a>

**Additional Resource:**

- US CDC Alert - Guidance for Clinicians Caring for Individuals Recently Evacuated from Afghanistan (September 20, 2021): <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2021/han00452.asp>