21 April 2015, Cairo, Egypt – WHO warns of an imminent collapse of health care services in Yemen. Health facilities are struggling to function as they face increasing shortages of life-saving medicines and vital health supplies, frequent disruptions in power supply and lack of fuel for generators. Lack of fuel has also disrupted functionality of ambulances and the delivery of health supplies across the country.

Power cuts and fuel shortages also threaten to disrupt the vaccine cold chain, leaving millions of children below the age of five unvaccinated. This increases the risk of communicable diseases such as measles, which is prevalent in Yemen, as well as polio, which has been eliminated but is now at risk of reappearing.

Shortages of safe water have resulted in increased risk of diarrhoea, and other diseases. “Over the past 4 weeks, national disease surveillance reports show a doubling in the number of cases of bloody diarrhoea in children below the age of 5, as well as an increase in the number of cases of measles and suspected malaria. High rates of malnutrition among women and children below the age of 5 have also been reported,” says Dr Ahmed Shadoul, WHO Representative for Yemen.

Patients are facing restrictions in accessing health services. Since the conflict escalated, there has been a 40% reduction in overall daily consultations in health facilities, indicating that many men, women and children are unable to reach health facilities due to blocked roads and fighting in the streets. WHO staff in Yemen report that patients, ambulances and transport with medical supplies are unable to move without risk.

The Ministry of Public Health and Population has stated that the major hospitals will soon be completely unable to provide humanitarian and emergency services or to perform operations and provide intensive care to needy patients. According to the Ministry, life-saving and health protection programmes will gradually collapse due to lack of medicines for chronic diseases such as kidney dialysis, cardiac and oncology. Laboratory and blood transfusion services are also at risk. Blood banks are witnessing serious shortages in reagents needed for blood donation and transfusion, while blood stocks are in danger of impairment due to power outages. Shortage of supplies and fuel will also affect the ability of ambulance teams to deliver life-saving interventions