

WHO Says ‘Huge Biological Risk’ After Sudan Fighters Occupy Lab

‘One of the fighting parties’ has seized control of the central public health laboratory in Khartoum and ‘kicked out all of the technicians’.

By [Al-Jazeera](#)

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UN officials have said that one side in the Sudan conflict has seized control of a national health lab in the capital of Khartoum that holds biological material, calling it an “extremely dangerous” development.

The announcement on Tuesday came as officials warned that more refugees could flee Sudan despite a ceasefire between rival forces.

The [fighting has plunged Sudan](#) into chaos, pushing the already heavily aid-dependent African nation to the brink of collapse. Before the clashes, the UN estimated that a third of Sudan’s population – or about 16 million people – needed assistance, a figure that is likely to increase.

Dr Nima Saeed Abid, the World Health Organization’s representative in Sudan, expressed concerns that “one of the fighting parties” – he did not identify which one – had seized control of the central public health laboratory in Khartoum and “kicked out all of the technicians”.

“That is extremely, extremely dangerous because we have polio isolates in the lab. We have measles isolates in the lab. We have cholera isolates in the lab,” he told a UN

briefing in Geneva by video call from Port Sudan. “There is a huge biological risk associated with the occupation of the central public health lab in Khartoum by one of the fighting parties.”

The expulsion of technicians and power cuts in Khartoum mean that “it is not possible to properly manage the biological materials that are stored in the lab for medical purposes,” WHO said.

The lab is located in central Khartoum, close to flashpoints of the fighting that have pitted Sudan’s military against the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group that grew out of the government-backed Popular Defence Forces – called “Janjaweed” by the rebels – implicated in atrocities in the Darfur conflict.

Dozens of hospitals have shuttered in Khartoum and elsewhere across the country due to the fighting and dwindling medical and fuel supplies, according to the Sudanese Doctors’ Syndicate.

“If the violence does not stop, there is a danger that the health system will collapse,” the UN agency warned Friday.



Drive-by video shows destruction in Sudan’s capital ([Click here to view the video](#))

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Featured image: A staff member works at National Public Health Laboratory in Khartoum, Sudan in this undated image posted to social media on December 31, 2020. [File: National Public Health Laboratory – Sudan/Handout via Reuters]

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