Eliminating cholera on the island of Hispaniola
A 11 million Swiss francs international appeal for Haiti and the Dominican Republic
Overview

The island of Hispaniola had not seen cholera for over 100 years. But when it hit in 2010, it hit with a vengeance producing the largest outbreak of cholera in recent history and claiming over 8,600 lives to date. The severity of the outbreak, that began in Haiti and then spread to the Dominican Republic, is attributed to the low level of access in Haiti to adequate water, sanitation and health care; the lowest levels of water and sanitation of any country in the Americas. Only 29% of the population has access to improved sanitation and in the poorest 20% of the population, only 1% has access to an improved source of water (PAHO). The 2010 earthquake that displaced 1.5 million people into densely populated camps with poor sanitary conditions further aggravated this situation.

The current situation: The governments of Haiti and Dominican Republic alongside the international community have done a huge amount to tackle the outbreak through emergency response and prevention activities and this has led to an overall decrease in the number of cholera cases. However the situation remains precarious and is exacerbated each year by the rainy season and most recently by the overall decline in international humanitarian funding.

Responding to the crisis is essential, but longer-term action supporting water, sanitation and health facilities is urgently needed to have a lasting result.

The opportunity: Cholera is treatable, avoidable and can be eliminated if the public, Governments and the humanitarian community work together. This is why the Red Cross is launching a two-year campaign (2014-2016) based on the objectives of a ten-year plan created by the Governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic with the aim of eliminating the disease.

The Red Cross, represented in Hispaniola by the Haitian and Dominican Republic Red Cross, is the only organisation based in every corner of the island. With 30,000 volunteers across Hispaniola the Red Cross is in a unique position to make cholera elimination a reality. The dry season (November - March) offers a huge opportunity to scale up operations and break the chain of transmission while levels of cholera are low. If we act now, the worst outbreak of cholera in recent history could soon be a thing of the past. This is our goal.
How the Red Cross will support the elimination of cholera

The Red Cross will tackle the elimination of cholera with a four-pronged approach, directly supporting the objectives of the National Directorate for Water Supply and Sanitation (DINEPA) and the Ministry of Health (MSPP). Critical to success will be the vast network of Red Cross volunteers, the support of Red Cross Partner National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

1. PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

We will boost capacity to respond to spikes in cholera through preparedness measures by:

- Stockpiling emergency supplies such as hygiene kits and water purification tablets
- Contributing to the national cholera alert and epidemiology surveillance systems
- Preparation for, and mobilisation following, cholera spikes, including training of volunteers on disinfection.
- Leading targeted hygiene promotion activities to improve hygiene knowledge and practices
- Repairing water and sanitation infrastructure damaged by heavy rain or hurricanes
- Training volunteers to be able to identify and tackle the main issues in their community

2. IMPROVING WATER & SANITATION FACILITIES

We will focus on the most at risk areas - households, schools and marketplaces - to reduce the risk of infection from and exposure to cholera. We will do this through:

- Rehabilitating and constructing water supplies and sanitation facilities
- Distributing hygiene products and aqua tabs
- Installing hand washing stations
- Constructing toilets at market places and schools and supporting the development of management and fee collection systems to ensure sustainable maintenance
- Providing technical support to households so that they can construct better sanitation facilities

3. PREVENTION THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & HYGIENE PROMOTION

We will work with communities to make sure that they have the knowledge and materials required to respond to cholera in their area by:

- Undertaking hygiene promotion activities in schools, households and marketplaces
- Providing educational materials on proper hygiene practices
- Training and mobilising volunteers
- Disseminating cholera prevention messages and gathering community feedback to ensure relevancy of messaging and activities via multiple channels including radio, SMS and free phone information line
- Producing an educational film on toilet construction in partnership with DINEPA
- Developing a communications plan for food hygiene promotion with MSPP

4. SUPPORTING WIDER GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

We will support the Ministries of health and the national water and sanitation authorities of both countries to have increased capacity to respond to and mitigate against cholera by:

- Improving disinfection procedures in cholera treatment centers and units
- Supporting field investigations, conducting hygiene promotion and awareness raising activities and the distribution of hygiene and water treatment products
- Supplying information to the government surveillance systems
Cholera response of the Red Cross to date

In response to the cholera outbreak the Red Cross has previously:

- Supported 7 cholera treatment centers or units
- Supported over 40,000 patients hospitalized in the Red Cross cholera treatment centers and units
- Built and operated over 200 oral rehydration points

Jean Woodson, age 5, lives in a remote area just outside the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince called Fort Mercredi. Fort Mercredi is inaccessible by car or motorcycle and the only way to get there is on foot. Jean started vomiting one morning as he was getting ready for school. His parents quickly took him to the Red Cross cholera treatment center located approximately 20 minutes from their home. Jean woodson spent 4 days in the cholera treatment center before he was able to return home.

“We are glad that the Red Cross Cholera Treatment Centre was nearby because if it hadn’t been we would have had to make the two hour trip to another one. I hate to think what might have happened if we had had to make that long trip,” said Jean Woodson’s father.

“We have a huge opportunity and a responsibility to eliminate cholera from this island once and for all. We know how to tackle it, and with your help our volunteers can make it happen. It is critical that we act now to ensure that cholera not only leaves this island but also stays away for good. We urgently need funds to scale up operations to support Government plans to break the chain of cholera transmission. Not to seize this opportunity because of a lack of funding is simply not an excuse.”

- Alexandre Claudon, Country Representative, IFRC Haiti Delegation

The IFRC is currently appealing for 11 million Swiss francs of funding to save lives by continuing to provide cholera response activities and improve the water, sanitation and hygiene situation across both countries.

Your support will make a difference. Thank you.