

# Information bulletin



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## Haiti: Cholera outbreak

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This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Haitian Red Cross Society (HRCS) with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has determined that external assistance is not required, and is therefore not seeking funding or other assistance from donors at this time.

The Haitian Red Cross Society with the support of Red Cross partners in country, is supporting government's actions in response to a cholera outbreak in the Arbonite region of Haiti. The latest figures from the Pan American Health Organisation report 1,500 cases and 138 deaths.

The Red Cross is mobilizing health, water and sanitation equipment to the affected region to support the local hospital, the Ministry of Public Health and the water and sanitation authorities as requested.

In addition, the National Society, the IFRC team and Partner National Societies are present in coordination meetings with the respective cluster groups and official authorities.

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## The Situation

This week the Haitian Ministry of Public Health has reported a high number of deaths and cases of acute diarrhoea in Artibonite region (located two hours from the capital city of Port-au-Prince). Although this area was not directly affected by the January 12 earthquake, it has become home to thousands of vulnerable people who have been displaced by the quake and are living in impoverished situations.

A team of epidemiologists from the Department of Public Health and Population (MSPP) was mobilized to Artibonite to analyze samples taken from several patients to identify the causative agent of the acute diarrhoea outbreak. As a result of these analyses, the Ministry confirmed that *Vibrio cholerae* is causing the outbreak and that the source of the contamination is the river. The Ministry is working in coordination with



21 October, the Italian Red Cross water treatment plant was put into action with the Colombian Red Cross helping with packing and loading. Teams worked through the night to fill one truck with 1/2 litres sachets of treated water. On Wednesday 20 October, the Haitian Red Cross sent a truck loaded with medical supplies to the main hospital in Saint Marc. Already these supplies, including IV fluids, antibiotics and first aid kits, are being used to treat patients. Severine Vanel / IFRC

the Department of Civil Protection (DPC) and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) to respond to the cholera outbreak. Haitian health authorities have recommended the application of good hygiene practices such as frequent hand washing, personal hygiene, safe water use and food preparation to the population.

The emergency is the first major disease outbreak since the 12 January earthquake that struck Haiti. Hundreds have been hospitalized in the Arbonite region in the past few days; while many are seeking treatment in a local hospital in the town of Saint-Marc. To date 1,500 cases and 138 deaths have been reported according to the latest figures from PAHO<sup>1</sup>. These are preliminary figures and changes are expected as information continues to arrive.

The most affected communities are Desdunnes, Saint-Marc, Grand Salines, Estere, Marchant Dessalines, Verretes, La Chapelle, Petit Riviere de Artibonite, Mirebalais and Saint Michel de l'Attalaye. The disease has spread in the Plateau Central where eight deaths were already identified.

The Haitian government has activated the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene cluster. In order to raise awareness the government will implement a communications plan with daily press releases.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Since the onset of the outbreak, the Haitian Red Cross Society has been in regular contact with the Ministry of Public Health, the DPC, the National Directorate for Water and Sanitation (Direction Nationale de l'Eau Potable et Assainissement – DINEPA) and other agencies in-country in order to obtain up-to-date information and coordinate response actions. In line with its auxiliary role to the government, the National Society is responding to the needs and requests presented by the Ministry of Public Health and the hospital in Saint-Marc. In addition, the National Society and Red Cross partners are participating in meetings with the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Health, and Education (Sensitization) clusters. Coordination is ongoing with all partners in the field for the scale up of hygiene promotion activities.

The IFRC office in Geneva and the Americas Zone Office in Panama are in constant communication with the IFRC team in the field and the Haitian Red Cross to reinforce actions as requested. A teleconference took place on 22 October to outline a strategic approach to the response actions. The following lines were discussed:

- a. Support to case management through offering prepositioned cholera kits and other supplies to those involved in clinical case management in Artibonite.
- b. Support to health and hygiene promotion through social mobilization and provision of safe water:
  - Supporting the affected HRCS branches in mobilizing volunteers.
  - Supporting the affected area through the provision of safe water.
  - Making available the necessary tools for hygiene promotion and epidemic control activities.
- c. Effective coordination and information
  - Information-sharing and coordination with Movement partners.
  - Coordination with the Haitian Ministry of Public Health, PAHO, OCHA, Health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene clusters.

An assessment has been conducted in the presence of Haitian Red Cross Society management and health department regarding the resources available within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in terms of capacity, including both human and technical resources. All departments within the IFRC team in Haiti—relief, water and sanitation, health, logistics, communications, and reporting, disaster preparedness and risk reduction – have been activated and are on stand-by to support the response to the outbreak. Three Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) in Port-au-Prince were put on alert with a request for technical capacity in health, water and sanitation.

<sup>1</sup>The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has issued a map on 22 October of the affected area. See map in the following URL: [http://reliefweb.int/rw/fullmaps\\_am.nsf/luFullMap/4ABCC99218FF36BB852577C4006E5B52/\\$File/EP-2010-000210-HTI\\_1022.pdf?OpenElement](http://reliefweb.int/rw/fullmaps_am.nsf/luFullMap/4ABCC99218FF36BB852577C4006E5B52/$File/EP-2010-000210-HTI_1022.pdf?OpenElement)

The mapping of the Movement resources indicates that there are delegates available specialized in water and sanitation, hygiene promotion, community mobilization and health and there are medical personnel that can be mobilized by the Partner National Societies still operating hospitals and clinics in country. As for technical equipment the Movement has cholera kits, interagency medical kits, tents, sleeping mats, tarps, blankets, boots, gloves, masks, cleaning kits, chlorine, buckets, jerrycans, aquatabs, purification sachets, water treatment plants, water tankers, water bladders, trucks, 4x4 vehicles and prepositioned stocks of non-food items. The Haitian Red Cross Society supported by the Spanish Red Cross will go to Saint-Marc and assess the Haitian Red Cross Society human resource capacity for hygiene promotion.

As an immediate response on Wednesday 20 October, the Haitian Red Cross Society sent medical supplies to the main hospital in Saint-Marc. Already these supplies, including IV fluids, oral serum, antibiotics, gauzes and pads, family water filters, individual water filters and first aid kits, are being used to treat patients.

Safe sanitation and hygiene practices are also being promoted through the effort of Red Cross Societies present in Haiti such as the British, French and Spanish Red Cross, while the Canadian, Finnish, German and Norwegian Red Cross offer health support, Italian and Colombian Red Cross focused their support in producing and packaging 16,000 litres of clean water, ready for distribution. Moreover, the HRCS volunteers supported by the French Red Cross and the Spanish Red Cross are positioning water treatment units in the Petite Riviere in the Arbonite region. Both Partner National Societies have extensive experience in working in Centre, Hinche and Haut-Arbonite.

The French Red Cross will also preposition water bladders, aquatabs, tents and support hygiene promotion activities, scaling up its "hand-washing day" campaign. The American Red Cross will support with chlorine purchase and the British Red Cross will assist the French Red Cross with its hygiene promotion activities and technical equipment. The Spanish Red Cross is helping the French Red Cross with technical support and will deploy water production plants and hygiene promotion teams.

The IFRC has been coordinating emergency response activities with the Haitian Red Cross since symptoms began to appear in the region. On Friday 22 October, 31,000 litres of clean water, chlorine, and 3 cholera kits capable of treating 3,600 people are being mobilized from the IFRC camp in Port-au-Prince. The kits cover prevention and treatment and include antibiotics; 5,000 masks and surgical gloves; 300,000 aquatabs; rolls of plastic sheeting (to be used on mattresses) as well as 10 large tents and sleeping mats to increase the hospital's capacity. In addition, a tanker with 15,000 litres of water to support the hospital in Saint-Marc is being mobilized.

Since Friday as well the population is receiving SMS messages in Creole with information on the outbreak including good hygiene practices. The National Society and IFRC teams have cholera information, education and communication (IEC) materials ready for distribution. In order to scale up hygiene promotion activities volunteers will be trained using the IFRC Epidemic Control Volunteer manual and toolkit, which is available in French and Creole. The Movement is coordinating its messaging efforts through standardisation with the support of the Haitian Red Cross Society. The "Red Cross Radio" will hold a special information session Saturday 23 stressing good hygiene practices.

Dominican authorities are closely monitoring the situation in Haiti and are coordinating possible pre-emptive resources to be deployed in the border area to re-enforce hygiene promotion prevention messages and scaling up safe water distribution. The Dominican Red Cross (DRC) has been requested by the Ministry of Health to analyse response scenario for both prevention and water intervention should the situation requires it. The IFRC Regional Representation for the Latin Caribbean is supporting the DRC with technical expertise for a possible evaluation at the border if needed.

The Emergency Health Coordinator for the Americas will arrive to Haiti on Saturday 23 October 2010, to further assess the situation and support the ongoing efforts of the Red Cross actors in the field. The communications teams in the field, Geneva and the Americas Zone Office keep constant coordination and are constantly monitoring the situation. A Media Service Update containing key messages, a web story on the response to the outbreak, a Cumulus basket with visual material from the field, and spokesperson contact information has been issued. As more information is made available, additional IFRC technical support from the Americas Zone Office is on standby as requested.

## How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The International Federation's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The International Federation's work is guided by [Strategy 2020](#) which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.

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