

Intended for healthcare professionals



News

Violence hinders efforts to stem Haiti cholera epidemic as deaths continue to rise

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¹Geneva

Efforts by Haitian and international health personnel to contain the cholera outbreak on the devastated island are being hampered by violence and widespread insecurity, top humanitarian officials and agencies say.

Violence and instability since the 28 November presidential and legislative elections, “has had a detrimental effect on the fight against the cholera epidemic,” says the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the regional arm of the World Health Organization.

Similarly, the European Union’s Humanitarian Affairs commissioner Kristilina Geogieva, said that insecurity in Haiti “is killing more people by preventing treatment than by violence in the streets.”

The Haitian ministry of health said that up to 10 December 104918 people had been affected by cholera, of whom about half had been admitted to hospital, and 2359 had died.

A senior WHO official told the *BMJ* the reporting of cholera cases in Haiti “is very weak.” To rectify the problem, health experts are trying to strengthen community level surveillance.

Concerns have been expressed by humanitarian officials over the growing number of hospitalised cases and deaths in recent days in Nord, Nippes, Grand’ Anse, and in the Sud Est departments.

The PAHO says epidemiological data indicate the disease—which has reached all 10 departments on the island —“will continue to spread.”

If turmoil persists, Geogieva warned, “The cholera outbreak can go out of control. It is essential to allow patients to be treated, clean water to be provided and good sanitation to be ensured.”

In some parts of the island medical teams were unable to leave their bases, and people have also been unable to access treatment and prevention assistance, and the distribution of water trucking, water supply chlorination, and septage (partially treated waste store in a septic tank) collection were substantially reduced, or in some cases suspended, UN officials said.

As a result of the unrest—which has included roadblocks—shipments of vital medical supplies to the north and south have been delayed, and in Les Cayes, in the Sud department, the medical warehouse of the Haitian ministry of health was attacked, UN officials said.

Commissioner Geogieva said another EU aid package of €10m (£0.85m; \$13.2m) was conditional on unimpeded access and respect for basic humanitarian principles.

Unicef officials say that so far the agency has delivered 63.6 million Aquatabs from the 100 million ordered, and since the outbreak has brought in over 27 tons of goods, including oral rehydration serums, and medical and hygiene kits.

But two planeloads of Unicef supplies destined for cholera treatment centres in Haiti had to be redirected to neighbouring Santo Domingo, Unicef officials said.

The security situation also slowed down World Food Programme operations throughout Haiti.

Stephanie Tremblay, World Food Programme spokeswoman in Port-au-Prince, told the *BMJ*, there were no disruptions in food assistance provided to health centres, as the quantities delivered before the disturbances were sufficient to allow health centres to continue providing food assistance.

A few deliveries took place over the weekend and were fully resuming early this week, she said.

Notes

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What would be the most appropriate replacement for the term junior doctors in the UK?

- Postgraduate doctors
- Doctors
- Doctors in training
- The specific phase/year F1, CT1, ST3...
- Non-consultant doctor
- Attending/Resident
- None -- junior doctors is the correct term
- Other:

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