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SUCCESS STORY

Prompt Diagnosis and Treatment Prevents Epidemic in Pakistan

USAID-funded diarrhea treatment centers credited with maintaining an exceptionally low fatality rate



Photo: Trevor White, USAID/OFDA

Members of USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Team visit a newly-established diarrhea treatment center in Sindh Province.

In the aftermath of historic flooding, in a country where diarrheal diseases traditionally account for 9 percent of all deaths, USAID-funded diarrhea treatment centers have successfully maintained a fatality rate of less than 0.01 percent among admitted patients.

During the summer of 2010, unusually heavy rainfall caused extensive flooding throughout Pakistan, encompassing one-fifth of the country and displacing an unprecedented 12 million people in one month. Flooding emergencies of this type often result in an outbreak of waterborne disease, particularly when families are displaced to crowded camps with limited access to sanitation facilities and safe drinking water.

At the onset of the emergency, USAID and the U.N. World Health Organization (WHO) worked to expand the Disease Early Warning System (DEWS), a network of permanent and mobile medical clinics that monitors, reports on, and responds to outbreaks of disease in order to prevent an epidemic.

USAID has supported DEWS since 2008. In early August 2010, DEWS reported a rising trend of acute watery diarrhea (AWD) cases in several flood-affected provinces. In several of these areas, the increase was sudden and outside normal seasonal trends. AWD often results from a severe communicable disease, such as cholera, and requires proper diagnosis and rapid rehydration to prevent death. Recognizing the dangers associated with AWD, USAID worked through WHO to establish diarrhea treatment centers (DTCs) immediately in the most at-risk districts.

As of late October 2010, 63 DTCs were operational in 41 flood-affected districts. Between August 10 and October 31, more than 60,500 patients were treated and 15,000 were admitted for longer term care at DTCs countrywide. Among those admitted, only 58 diarrhea-related deaths were recorded.

In an average year, diarrheal diseases are the fourth most common cause of death in Pakistan, accounting for approximately 9 percent of all deaths countrywide, according to WHO. However, as the U.N. recently reported, USAID-funded DTCs have enabled health workers in Pakistan to maintain an uncommonly low fatality rate—less than 0.01 percent of patients admitted to diarrhea treatment facilities.