



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)  
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San Jose, Costa Rica

**DISASTER RESPONSE**

## Hygiene Education, Medical Treatment Help Improve Haiti Cholera Situation

Hygiene promotion, cholera prevention education, medical treatment, and distribution of emergency relief supplies have formed key components of USAID/OFDA's cholera response programming in Haiti.

For example, in the town of Mirebalais, Centre Department, and surrounding rural areas, USAID/OFDA partner Mercy Corps organizes hygiene promotion sessions; distribution of relief commodities such as oral rehydration salts (ORS), water purification tablets, and containers for safe water storage; water chlorination; and training of community decontamination teams, including chlorinators and sprayers.

The Mercy Corps hygiene promotion sessions draw large crowds and include repeated demonstration of proper hand-washing techniques and home preparation of ORS (with salt, sugar, and lime); the Mercy Corps teams conduct daily events throughout their areas of responsibility and make sure to visit each community at least once per month. Hygiene promotion events also include specific activities for children, including hand-washing practice and learning of songs to help children remember the different steps of successful cholera prevention.

According to Mercy Corps, ongoing, persistent hygiene promotion efforts have helped local populations improve hygiene and sanitation habits and lower the rate of new cholera cases in most areas.

For instance, Mercy Corps staff reported that hygiene promotion in the rural commune of Sarazin outside Mirebalais



Photo by Kendra Helmer, USAID/Haiti

**Haitian schoolchildren pick up ORS packets distributed by USAID/OFDA partner Mercy Corps at a recent community hygiene promotion session near Mirebalais, Centre Department.**

helped lower the number of people in the area seeking treatment from 250 per day at the height of the cholera outbreak to approximately 80 per day by late January.

Mercy Corps staff member Marie Dominique Beauzile notes that community involvement in the hygiene promotion program, including the formation of

community hygiene committees and employment of qualified residents as hygiene promoters, chlorinators, and sprayers, will help the effects of the program last a long time.

To date, Mercy Corps has reached more than 183,000 people with USAID/ **Continued on page 2**

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Photo by Kendra Helmer, USAID/Haiti

**U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meets with staff at a USAID/OFDA-supported cholera treatment facility.**

## USAID/OFDA Provides \$40.5 million for Cholera Response

On October 21, 2010, the Government of Haiti Ministry of Public Health and Population confirmed a cholera outbreak in Artibonite Department. The outbreak subsequently spread to each of Haiti's 10 departments.

In response, USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (USAID/DART) to Haiti to coordinate USAID/OFDA response efforts with USAID/Haiti, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and identify and respond to humanitarian needs. Today, more than four months after

the outbreak began, cholera has affected more than 245,000 people and resulted in more than 4,625 deaths nationwide. However, since early January, the rate of new cholera cases has steadily declined, primarily due to extensive hygiene promotion activities and countrywide cholera information campaigns.

As of February 25, USAID/OFDA had provided approximately \$40.5 million for programs in health and water, sanitation, and hygiene, as well as support for logistics and delivery of relief supplies for cholera prevention and treatment.



Photo by Kylie Holmes, USAID/OFDA

**Nurses tend to children recovering from cholera at the Saint Michel cholera treatment facility.**

## Cholera Prevention Awareness Grows

Continued from page 1

OFDA-funded hygiene promotion and cholera prevention activities in Centre Department. Throughout Haiti, more than a dozen USAID/OFDA partners are conducting similar hygiene promotion activities that reach an estimated 98,000 people each day.

USAID/DART Program Officer Rob Friedman notes, "We are fortunate that cholera is a disease that can be combated successfully with simple hand-washing and water treatment. A significant component of our programming has provided just that to Haitians across the country. Haitians have the tools and knowledge to protect themselves and limit the recurrence of this disease."

### Reaching Rural Communities

Because cholera has reached even the most remote villages in Haiti, USAID/OFDA has funded International Medical Corps (IMC) and others to establish cholera treatment facilities (CTFs) in rural communities, as well as oral rehydration points (ORPs) in rural and inaccessible areas throughout the country.

A USAID/OFDA-funded CTF in Saint Michel, a rural town in Artibonite Department, is located adjacent to a hospital and provides approximately 40 additional beds for cholera patients, as well as a dozen extra nurses and doctors. According to CTF staff, the facility serves eight rural communities in a 26-mile radius, and families often travel several hours over difficult terrain to reach the site.

Throughout Artibonite Department, USAID/OFDA has also funded ORPs, sites where individuals can seek preliminary treatment through ORS, often a lifesaving intervention. Staff at ORPs can also arrange transportation for cholera patients to the nearest CTF. In the town of Ennery, located approximately one hour's drive from Saint Michel, IMC is utilizing USAID/OFDA funds to contract an on-call tap-tap cab driver to transport cholera patients to the Saint Michel CTF. Without this transportation, individuals in Ennery would have to walk uphill for more than five hours to reach the facility.

### Success of Cholera Information Campaigns

With USAID/OFDA funding, IMC has also employed hundreds of community health workers in Artibonite Department, more than half of whom work in rural areas. These health workers visit households, schools, and community groups to collect information on suspected cholera cases, refer individuals with cholera symptoms to a nearby

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## DISASTER RESPONSE

### USAID/OFDA Earthquake Partners Contribute to the Cholera Response

Many of USAID/OFDA's implementing partners carrying out earthquake response activities and recovery programs have adapted their projects in response to the cholera outbreak.

"Contrary to the expectations of many, no rampant cholera outbreak has occurred in the crowded camps of Port-au-Prince. This is testimony to the effectiveness of the earthquake response, which provided camp populations with immediate access to clean water and cholera prevention information through hygiene education. In fact, many camp-based CTFs reported receiving more cholera patients from the surrounding neighborhoods than the camps themselves," said USAID/DART Program Officer Heather Huppe.

Partners also adjusted earthquake-focused programs outside Port-au-Prince. For example, in Artibonite Department, USAID/OFDA partner the Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) has been working to expand and repair shelters for families hosting individuals displaced by last year's earthquake. After the cholera outbreak, CECI adapted the shelter program to include cholera prevention activities, including hygiene promotion training for teachers and school directors and household-level distribution of water purification tablets and ORS. In Mirebalais, USAID/OFDA partner Mercy Corps is now utilizing a cash-for-work program for earthquake-affected individuals to repair roads linking rural communities to nearby medical clinics and CTFs.

ORP or CTF, disseminate cholera information, and conduct hygiene promotion campaigns.

According to an IMC doctor at the site, the CTF in Saint Michel has seen a significant decline in new cholera cases since the end of 2010. The CTF is now receiving approximately 10 to 15 patients per day, in comparison to the 30 or more patients admitted to the facility daily during November and December. IMC staff members also noted that although the overall patient caseload in recent weeks has plateaued, the number of severe (level C) patients has declined. Most new cholera patients at the facility are now level A and B patients, who arrive at the CTF with the early symptoms of cholera and mild to moderate dehydration.

As a result, the vast majority of new patients can be treated effectively with ORS and discharged quickly. Nurses working at the facility believe that the comparative increase in A and B patients indicates that community-level cholera awareness campaigns have become increasingly more effective and, as a result, individuals are coming to CTFs as soon as cholera is suspected, rather than waiting until the illness progresses.



Photo by Kylie Holmes, USAID/OFDA

**USAID/OFDA and IMC staff discuss hygiene education activities at the Saint Michel cholera treatment facility.**