
Sector Brief - Health

Providing Medical Assistance to the Haitian People

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In response to the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti Jan.12, the U.S. is expediting the delivery of medical supplies, providing critical health services, and conducting assessments to help determine health priorities as part of the international response effort. The U. S. government also is helping to plan for Haiti's long-term public health needs and harmonizing health inputs with other donors and groups led by the government of Haiti and coordinated by the Pan American Health Organization.

Current Strategy and Goals

The U.S. government's Haitian health care response strategy is currently focused on:

- Providing competent and effective medical care to injured earthquake survivors in the immediate aftermath and beyond
- Working to prevent additional health crises, particularly outbreaks of communicable diseases
- Coordinating with the U.N. Health Cluster, in a health care response that is need-based, locally driven, flexible and under the leadership of the government of Haiti, in cooperation with the United Nations and the non-governmental community
- Providing technical assistance to help improve the Haitian health care system in the future and that these efforts build upon the extensive experience of the U.S. government in Haiti

Progress to Date

The U.S. government designated Dr Ron Waldman of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as the Coordinator of US government Medical and Health Emergency Response located in Haiti. Dr Waldman works closely with an interagency team to advance the goals above and to report daily on the health sector response to Administrator Shah.

Under the leadership of the Pan American Health Organization, the U.S. is an active partner in the United Nations health cluster for Haiti that includes more than 160 non-government organizations, bilateral aid organizations and governments.

To date, the U.S. government has provided a variety of health care support, including the deployment of the Navy hospital ship USNS COMFORT, five Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs) on the ground, and an HHS International Medical Surgical Team (IMSuRT) adding to over 270 medical personnel in total. As a result, we have achieved the following to date:

- U.S. health care teams on the ground in Haiti have seen more than 17,200 patients including approximately 1,870 yesterday, Jan. 27. Since they began seeing patients on Jan. 17, HHS medical teams have performed 56 surgeries and delivered 23 babies. Based on Haitian Ministry of Health priority, patients are being sent to the USNS COMFORT. So far 605 patients have been admitted to the ship and 217 surgeries have been performed aboard Comfort. More than 19,000 Haitians have been treated by Comfort personnel both aboard ship and at ashore locations.
- The U.S. government is currently providing medical supplies and equipment to health facilities throughout Haiti, ensuring that the medical needs of those that are outside of U.S. health facilities are met.
- U.S. government personnel in collaboration with partners at the World Health Organization and the Haitian Health Ministry have launched a health assessment of the public health risks at more than 30 locations in Port-au-Prince and throughout Haiti. Thus far there have been no reported outbreaks of communicable diseases such as measles and rubella in the capital city.
- CDC water sanitation and hygiene experts developed a map of Haiti's natural water supply and how it relates to where people are now & created a precise map of health care facilities, including longitude and latitude coordinates which gives U.S. government personnel the ability to predict and deliver health commodities and assistance where they are most needed.
- Working with the WASH cluster, the CDC Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) has developed a map showing zones in Haiti where post-earthquake populations are congregating to identify whether they are near stagnant pools of water, open fields, soccer stadiums or other open area for possible natural threats - mosquito and other disease-carrying insects. This mapping system is being used by SOUTHCOM, PAHO, and Health and Human Services.
- The U.S. government is helping assess and address emergency maternal and infant health needs; conduct disease and injury surveillance; control infectious disease and prevent further injury; assess the state of local healthcare facilities and supporting the Haitian national health system's lab capability; provide communications messages to the people of Haiti concerning their own health and safety.
- To provide an emergency response to under nutrition, the U.S. government is working hand in hand with its non-governmental partners to distribute over 195,000 courses of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) to Haitian children and adults.
- The U.S. government is working with the World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization, and the Haitian Ministry of Health to conduct an assessment of the longer term viability of Haiti's health infrastructure and preparing a plan for reconstruction in the wake of the disaster. More than 85 health centers and clinics have been evaluated to date.

Next Steps

The U.S. government will continue providing health care assistance to the Haitian people and government in the weeks and months ahead. Our short-term priorities include:

- Maintaining an ongoing stream of medical and public health personnel and supplies to meet the evolving needs of the Haitian people.
- Working in concert with international partners to establish an effective and adequate recuperation and rehabilitation infrastructure in Haiti that allows injured earthquake survivors, particularly the large number of individuals with disabilities, to achieve the best possible health outcomes.
- Taking concrete steps with the U.N. Health Cluster and the government of Haiti to prevent and control outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as measles and dysentery; assessing the state of local healthcare facilities; supporting the Haitian national health system's lab capability to conduct regular epidemiological surveillance; and mapping the health threats Haiti now faces so that donated resources can be directed to areas where they can be used most effectively.

- Working with the Ministry of Haiti, UNICEF, PAHO, and WHO to conduct a targeted vaccination campaign to address Haiti's immediate health concerns, such as diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, and measles and to reestablish and strengthen the country's tuberculosis control programs.
- Continuing malnutrition prevention efforts including providing supplementary and therapeutic feeding to an estimated 60,000 Haitians.
- Addressing the needs of the 130,000 Haitians living with HIV, especially ensuring that the 50 percent of them who are on antiretroviral treatment have access to those life-sustaining drugs regardless of their location.
- Completing an assessment of Haiti's health facilities, personnel and supplies and supporting their improvement including the streamlining of logistical needs.
- Providing for orphans and vulnerable children including immediate care and protection, tracing and family reunification, and transitioning to longer term needs such as adoption and child protection.