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OCHA Haiti produces this report in collaboration with PAHO/WHO, other UN agencies and humanitarian partners.

Key Messages

- As of 31 August 2020, a total of 8,224 laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 201 deaths, have been reported by Haiti’s Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP). The downward trend in the incidence of laboratory-confirmed cases persists across the country.

- The daily number of confirmed cases has decreased from about 280 in late May to less than 50 in recent weeks. The overall case-fatality rate (the proportion of deaths among confirmed cases) is at 2.44%. At the departmental level, Grand’Anse and Artibonite are recording the highest case fatality rates (7.45% and 7.87%, respectively).

Government Updates

- On 4 July 2020, the Haitian Government relaunched the Commission Multisectorielle de Gestion de la Pandemie du COVID-19 (CMGP-COVID19) for 90 days. The Commission will advise the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) on issues relating to the strategic planning, the development and the implementation of the National COVID-19 Operational Response Plan (PONR).

- Schools reopened on August 10, 2020 and have been encouraged to take additional precautions such as increasing ventilation in classrooms, assigning dedicated personnel for COVID-19 prevention, and raising awareness amongst students.

Key Issues / Gaps

- While significant efforts are being made to respond to COVID-19, the crisis continues to exacerbate existing health care challenges. Haiti was already facing a shortage of health care professionals, and gaps in the availability of life-saving medicines, supplies, medical devices, and personal protective equipment (PPE). While the Government has reported that enough PPE is available and has been distributed to the departments, some health centers visited have reported not yet receiving the PPE. According to the Health Sector these factors created a temporary reduction in the availability of services offered by health institutions, including reproductive health care and routine immunization.

- Ongoing disruptions to the health care system are felt throughout Haiti. According to data from the National Unified Health Information System (SISNU), during January-May 2020, 16% fewer children had received the third dose of the pentavalent vaccine compared to the same period in 2019. In 2020, there were also significant reductions in the number of children who had received the inactivated polio vaccine (-14%) and the first dose of the measles-rubella vaccine (-8%). These statistics are worrisome, as they point towards a potential increase in the number of individuals susceptible to epidemic-prone diseases. A resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases (such as diphtheria, measles, polio) would further burden the Haitian health system already strained by COVID-19 and would inevitably result in increased morbidity and mortality, particularly among children and other vulnerable groups. Additionally, during the second quarter of 2020, the number of children admitted to malnutrition management centers decreased across the country, with 9,536 children in the first quarter and 6,460 in the second quarter.

- Concerted efforts are ongoing to raise better awareness around the virus, as it has been noted by the Communications Sector that there is an insufficient level of public understanding and awareness of COVID-19, which is a severe barrier to prevention. False information on the virus is being circulated, including through social
media, and there is a level of distrust of the public health system and government. Members of the public rarely wear face masks, and social distancing measures are generally not respected or are difficult to follow for many households. The Communications Sector has also reported that stigmatization is prevalent, especially in rural areas, and wearing a mask or staying in quarantine can lead to threats or violence. Many infected persons refuse the home care offered out of fear of stigmatization or mistrust. Health responders face reticence and sometimes hostility from the community.

- **Inflation of food prices**, and consequently, food security remains a significant concern. According to the latest Food Basket Bulletin, the value of the food basket has grown 29% on an annual basis. The increase of food prices directly correlates to the peak period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the slowdown in economic activity and the closure of borders. This development is also explained by the strong depreciation of the Gourde against the US Dollar (-12% between April and June 2020) in a context of strong dependency on food imports.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a **worsening of the socio-economic situation in rural areas across the country**. The demand for rural labor has considerably decreased due to the economic downturn and has been exacerbated by the increased flow of Haitian migrants arriving from the Dominican Republic, and the closure of schools. Rural labor represents an important source of income for poor households. In addition, below-normal rains since the end of March have slowed down the continuation of agricultural activities across the country. Most of the farming regions have not started planting crops for the spring season.

- IOM reports that **standardized migrant tracing remains challenging** as required data is not available electronically at all border points to facilitate the effective follow up and case management of migrants. At the official border crossing point of Anse-a-Pitre, more resources are needed to ensure availability of critical medical equipment to ensure the treatment of COVID-19 cases.

**Response**

**Strengthening the COVID-19 medical response**

- The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has allocated US$4 million to support work to combat COVID-19 through the health and WASH sectors. The projects, selected in collaboration with Haitian authorities based on a careful assessment of needs, will benefit 265,038 people in the North, North-West, South, South-East, Nippes, West, and Grand’Anse departments.

- MSPP is working, with the support of the PAHO/WHO, to strengthen its central and regional laboratory capacities, through the training of lab technicians, the procurement of reagents and other necessary materials. At present, 9 laboratories across the country are capable of testing for COVID-19. Since March, the Labomoto project’s field nurses have assisted with the collection and testing of 6,366 samples across Haiti’s 10 departments. About 80% of all samples collected outside of the Ouest department have been tested.

- To ensure safe treatment of patients in non-COVID health centers the humanitarian partners are supporting the MSPP in the set-up of screening and isolation spaces to detect suspected COVID-19 cases and transfer them to a dedicated health institution. PAHO/WHO has supported the set-up of early detection capacities in 147 health institutions, providing equipment (thermometers, oximeters and oxygen concentrators where needed), PPE and WASH kits to these institutions.

- Training on infection prevention and control measures has been delivered to 1,887 health care staff; and 699 medical staff have been trained on the delivery of oxygen therapy. Additionally, 4,586 Polyvalent Community Health Agents have been trained. A medical call center for the follow-up of COVID-19 suspected and confirmed cases in home isolation has been set-up and is now operational 24/7. Support has also been provided to improve coordination mechanisms among partners implicated in case management activities and to improve the overall mechanisms of the crisis cell.

- The Haitian National Directorate of Water and Sanitation (DINEPA) and its partners, supported by UNICEF, are carrying out technical studies in 29 out of 42 health care facilities identified by the Government to isolate and treat COVID-19 patients. WASH interventions have started in 10 of those facilities including: rehabilitation of water and sanitation infrastructures; waste management; infection prevention and control equipment, materials and training, and hygiene promotion in the facilities and surrounding communities. Work should begin in the remaining 33
facilities as soon approvals are received. Some challenges have been encountered, including difficulties of coordination within different levels of the MSPP.

- To support the continuity of primary health services and respond to the overall low attendance rates at health centers, the MSPP is working with the support of UNICEF to ensure the intensification of screening for acute maternal malnutrition; the reorganization of care and treatment activities in health centers; the provision of PPE; the weekly monitoring of nutritional supplies; and the dissemination of awareness-raising messages through various communications channels.

**Preventing the spread of the virus throughout the country**

- Community engagement and public awareness activities are being stepped up across the country by the Government, and humanitarian partners. Since the beginning of the crisis more than 3.9 million people have received awareness raising messages, more than 10,000 community and religious leaders have been engaged in the COVID-19 response and more than 8,700 handwashing stations have been installed, through UNICEF financed projects. To complement these public health messages, hygiene kits (such as masks, alcohol and soap) have been distributed. To reinforce COVID-19 prevention efforts in disaster affected communities, a total of 36,000 N95 masks and 1.1 million surgical masks have been allocated to the DGCP for distribution.

- All departments across the country are now implementing a common COVID-19 surveillance protocol. As part of these efforts, a total of 310 contact tracing teams and 49 investigation teams are active across the country. Aside from identifying and monitoring suspected cases and close contacts, these teams are also assisting with raising awareness about COVID-19 among local communities and supporting alert and response activities. Call centers and data analysis teams are present in all departments. Finally, information sharing systems are being set up across the country, of which 6 have already started producing epidemiological reports. Efforts are being directed towards harmonizing the various departmental databases.

- In light of the reopening of schools on August 10, the Ministry of Education is working with the support of UNICEF to ensure appropriate precautions and preventative measures are in place. This has included the distribution of mobile hand-washing stations throughout educational institutions. Additionally, plans are in place for some 1,300 schools across the country to benefit from the installation of WASH facilities, distribution of COVID-19 hygiene kits and the implementation of a COVID-19 prevention and awareness campaign targeting school children. Work is also being done to prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus in 400 institutional care centers for children in several departments, through the training of approximately 800 staff members in the West department. The trained focal points will then act as a COVID-19 focal point in their institution and will be responsible for overseeing preventative measures such as sanitation, building understanding and awareness, raising the alert for suspected cases and supporting residents in quarantine. Each center will also receive a hygiene and disinfection kit.

**Containing the virus at Haiti’s borders**

- Voluntary returns to Haiti have slightly increased since the outbreak of COVID-19. A total of 91,819 voluntary returns were observed at the border from 17 March to 13 August 2020. According to a statement by the Multisectoral Commission on 17 August 2020, 16% of Haitians returning to Haiti from the Dominican Republic test positive for COVID-19, and 95% of all imported cases are coming from the Dominican Republic. A protocol has been put in place to detect, refer, support and follow-up on potential migrants with COVID-19 at the Ouanaminthe, Belladere and Malpasse border crossing points. A COVID-19 awareness raising campaign is being conducted, including through sound truck, a visual arts display, and a psychosocial support hotline. Additionally, since early July, a team of psychologists were deployed to provide psychosocial support to vulnerable migrants and medical staff working at the border.

- The Government, together with UN partners, are working to ensure appropriate of COVID-19 containment measures are in place at the international Airport of Port-au-Prince and at the official border crossing point of Anse-a-Pitre. Migrant tracing is being conducted in Ouanaminthe and arrivals at the Toussaint Louverture International Airport are monitored throughout the quarantine period. As of 30 July 2020, out of 3,178 passengers arriving at the Toussaint Louverture International Airport, 1,909 were called as part of the monitoring, and 6,681 calls were placed. Suspected cases are referred to MSPP’s Directorate of Epidemiology, Laboratories and Research (DELR).
- At Ouanaminthe’s busiest border point with the Dominican Republic temporary emergency quarantine center, run by the IBESR and the Sisters of St. John the Evangelist in coordination with MSPP, has provided transit care to 95 unaccompanied migrant children to date including 45 boys and 50 girls.

**Monitoring food security**

- The Government is continuing to gather data to assess the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture and food security with the support of FAO and WFP. In June a market assessment survey in Saint-Michel and Marmelade demonstrated that assistance in the form of cash transfers is feasible and appropriate, and concluded that injecting cash in these communities is expected to have a positive effect on the markets. The evolution of prices and availability of food in the different markets across the country will be continuously monitored.

**Strengthening access and logistics**

- Since May 1st, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) helicopter managed by the WFP has carried 782 passengers and 10,742 kilograms of cargo. WFP continues to provide transport and storage services of COVID-19 supplies upon request.

- To ensure alternative transport and improve access to the areas where the most vulnerable people are the Mer Logistique Urgence Haïti (MERLUH) program will be launched in September to provide regular and free maritime transport services to the humanitarian community as well as storage services.

**Additional Information about COVID-19**

For more information on COVID-19 in Haiti, please visit OCHA Haiti’s dedicated COVID-19 page:


For more information on the actors involved in the COVID-19 response click here.

For updated figures, please visit the website of the Haitian Ministry of Health (MSPP): https://mspp.gouv.ht/

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