



International Medical Corps' Medical Officer leads a training session on COVID-19, covering guidance on the epidemiology of COVID-19, related isolation and quarantine procedures, disease surveillance methods, medical surge capacity requirements and the appropriate use and management of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Coronavirus cases in Venezuela continue to increase. According to the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center, as of July 24 there are more than 13,600 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country. Experts are concerned that this is an underestimate, due to limited testing and reporting. Venezuela's case count began to accelerate last month and is rising by more than 30% each week, according to Dr. Julio Castro, part of the medical advisory team for the country's national assembly. The government has attributed the increased infection rate to the return of Venezuelan migrants from neighboring countries. So far, more than 70,000 migrants have returned to the country since the start of the pandemic.

The number of confirmed cases in the countries surrounding Venezuela are very high: Brazil has more than 2.28 million, Peru has about 376,000, Colombia has more than 226,000 and Ecuador has more than 79,000. Rather than keep Venezuelans from returning to their country, the Venezuelan government—along with a variety of social missions and community organizers—has established epidemiological checkpoints along the border to test and treat migrants. Returning Venezuelans who test positive are sent to health centers to be treated and to live in quarantine for two weeks. As the number of cases continues to climb, border states—Zulia, Apure, Tachira and Bolivar—have emerged as hotspots for the virus, with nearly 40% of the country's cases reported in these areas.

Venezuela is ranked among the least prepared countries to respond to a pandemic, according to the 2019 Global Health Security Index. The country's severe economic crisis has crippled the healthcare system, with many facilities lacking the basic supplies needed to prevent and treat illnesses. In April 2020, it was reported that approximately two-thirds of the biggest hospitals in Venezuela do not have running water¹ but instead were relying on water distributions a few times a week. Additionally, facilities are suffering from constant blackouts, making it difficult to treat and care for patients. The economic crisis has also led to severe shortages of PPE, intensive-care beds, medicines and personnel. Many thousands of doctors and nurses are among the estimated 5 million Venezuelans who have migrated abroad in recent years. Venezuela has roughly 300 public hospitals, with 23,000 beds ready to receive patients, according to official figures.

Since the first coronavirus case was reported in early March, much of Venezuela has been under lockdown. However, in response to the increasing case numbers, the government implemented stricter lockdown measures in hotspots. Under

FAST FACTS

- 13,613 COVID-19 cases have been reported, along with 129 deaths. Experts are concerned that this may be an underestimate, due to limited testing and reporting.
- There is a high risk that the country's health system will be overwhelmed by even a moderate increase in COVID-19 cases.
- More than 7 million people need humanitarian assistance.

URGENT NEEDS

- The most urgent needs include staffing; medical supplies and equipment for health facilities; water, sanitation and hygiene services and supplies; and mental health and psychosocial support services.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/10/831569313/many-venezuelan-hospitals-lack-basics-to-function-let-alone-handle-covid-19>

Venezuela: COVID-19 Hotspots



Several states have emerged as COVID-19 hotspots, including Zulia, Táchira, Apure, Bolívar, Capital District and Miranda.

the strict lockdown orders, all businesses are barred from operating, except food and drug stores—which will have limited hours—and vital services, including healthcare and public transport. Curfews will remain in place as well, especially for the border states. States that have fewer case numbers will continue with a week-on/week-off quarantine, in an effort to revive some economic activity where possible. Schools and public-sector industries remain closed and all sporting events and flights are suspended.

International Medical Corps Response

In response to the dire needs existing in the country even before the COVID-19 pandemic, International Medical Corps deployed a team to Venezuela in March 2019. We are a registered non-profit in the country and have been authorized to provide humanitarian services. International Medical Corps has obtained permits from the Ministry of Health to import items directly into the country, and so far has shipped medicines and medical supplies valued at more than \$600,000. We expect to receive additional medicines and supplies worth more than \$1 million. Moving forward, International Medical Corps will add an Information Management Officer (IMO) to its team of medical and health professionals on the ground. The IMO will work closely with the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), along with all local humanitarian partners, to identify emerging gaps and trends, and strengthen our health activities and support for local organizations.

As concerns around COVID-19 continue to grow, International Medical Corps' team is participating in coordination meetings with UN agencies, INGOs, key health officials and mayors of municipalities to understand needs and areas where assistance is required. Our health team is also meeting with directors of health facilities in Miranda state and with officials in Táchira, Zulia, Apure and Bolívar states to discuss critical needs, particularly as these areas are expected to remain hotspots for the virus.

To address specific gaps identified in the border states, International Medical Corps will deploy emergency medical field units to support health facilities in Zulia, Apure and Táchira. Additionally, International Medical Corps will set up field units in Miranda. The field units will be set up to support triage and patient screening activities, and in some cases will be used to provide surge capacity for health facilities, as the number of cases continues to increase in these targeted areas along transit corridors. To ensure that patients receive the lifesaving care they need and that healthcare workers are able to perform their duties safely, International Medical Corps has procured medical supplies and PPE to support these hospitals. So far, International Medical Corps has distributed PPE to two health facilities, including one COVID-19 sentinel hospital.

International Medical Corps also is implementing a series of COVID-19 training sessions to provide healthcare professionals with instruction on COVID-19 epidemiology, infectious disease prevention and control procedures, and the proper use and management of PPE, utilizing techniques gained from our experience responding to COVID-19 in the United States and in our 30 missions abroad. The first set of training sessions began on July 23 with two health facilities, including one COVID-19 screening and treatment facility. Forty-six doctors and nurses attended the sessions, where participant numbers were limited due to the need for strict social distancing practices and restrictions. International Medical Corps will continue to provide additional training in the coming weeks.

Along with supporting efforts to respond to COVID-19, International Medical Corps is also working with local partners FUDEP and Fundación Nativo to provide health and hygiene services to indigenous populations in Bolívar state, where medical care is extremely limited or non-existent. By using mobile medical teams, International Medical Corps and our partners plan to provide services to 2,200 residents of Bolívar. The mobile medical teams will consist of providers who are trusted within the indigenous community and are best-prepared to meet the community's specific needs.



International Medical Corps staff leads a training session on COVID-19 for healthcare professionals on July 23.

International Medical Corps is also working with a social group in Venezuela to strengthen and increase access to mental health care services throughout Gran Caracas, Miranda, Capital District and La Guaria. Through this partner, International Medical Corps will access community-based mental health care centers, leveraging their robust network of social workers to increase the availability and quality of mental health care services at both the clinical and community level. This program builds on local capacities and significantly expands services at a time when there is a major gap in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services.

By enhancing the capacity of our local partner through targeted training, International Medical Corps will expand the social group's ability to provide the necessary care and interventions to those experiencing emotional distress and mental health conditions in a comprehensive fashion to a larger population. In addition, by providing increased knowledge and tools to community-based social workers, International Medical Corps and our partner will increase awareness among targeted communities about when to seek help and where to find services and care.