

Food and Water-Borne Illnesses



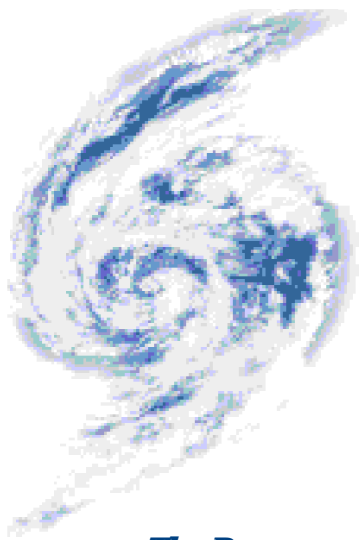
Photo: PAHO/WHO

Oral cholera vaccines recommended by WHO are not yet ready to be used in the countries of the Region. Vaccine cost limits access in the countries, its efficacy is not known in endemic areas, and it is not recommended for use in disaster situations.

The Participants,

recognized the following issues:

- ◆ Cholera is endemic to Central America.
- ◆ The presence of enteric illnesses and particularly cholera is a manifestation of social deterioration.
- ◆ The region has established clinical definition of cholera.
- ◆ During and after Hurricane Mitch, cholera was observed in relation to cross-border migrations.
- ◆ Damage to sewage networks by the hurricane resulted in contamination due to the mixture of waste and drinking water.
- ◆ In the most remote areas where communities do not have access to health services, there was a shortage of information on prevention of diarrheal diseases.
- ◆ There are cultural problems in accepting the taste of chlorine in water supply.
- ◆ There is little confidence in information provided by public services. There is a perception that inaccurate information is provided for economic and political reasons.
- ◆ Public policy and social spending in the countries have not been directed to the population at greatest risk;
- ◆ Many donated and stored foods were either rejected or disposed of because of their expiration dates or due to deficiencies in transportation and storage.
- ◆ Epidemiologically, cholera should be viewed in the context of enteric diseases and not independently.



- ◆ Oral cholera vaccines recommended by WHO are not yet ready to be used in the countries of the Region. Vaccine cost limits access in the countries, its efficacy is not known in endemic areas, and it is not recommended for use in disaster

situations. Measures taken to improve basic sanitation services and community education have proven their effectiveness in the prevention of food and water-borne illnesses.

The Recommendations

- ◆ Considering that food and water-borne illnesses, in particular cholera, result from deficiencies in human development, the working group calls on governments to focus their public policy and public spending on poverty issues, in particular on providing basic sanitation and drinking water services to the least advantaged populations.
- ◆ Governments should strengthen their National Emergency and Disaster Commissions with multidisciplinary health teams that maintain ongoing programs and evaluations for implementing emergency plans.
- ◆ Governments, with the participation of international agencies, NGOs, and civil society should cooperate in establishing a permanent *strategic plan* (comprising pre-disaster activities) using the support services offered by different agencies.
- ◆ Strengthened surveillance systems should be optimized for the control of food and water in the countries of the Region.
- ◆ Diagnostic laboratories should be strengthened; efforts should be made to ensure that surveillance includes monitoring resistance to antibiotics.
- ◆ Areas with the most vulnerable populations and those at greatest risk to disasters should be given priority.
- ◆ Infrastructure for adequate shelters with basic services should be established to avoid problems resulting from improvisation in disaster situations.
- ◆ Neighboring countries should establish an ongoing exchange of information systems on diarrheal diseases (before, during, and after disasters).
- ◆ There should be promotion for integrating health services into border activities for control measures.
- ◆ Owing to the impact of the exchange of information about cholera cases in border areas, it is recommended that notification be given regarding diarrheal diseases in general.
- ◆ Community education on prevention of diarrheal diseases should be implemented with the support of NGOs.



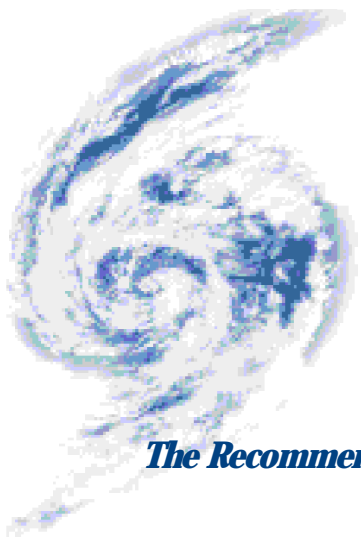
Photo: PAHO/WHO

To reduce the impact of vector-borne disease it is essential to activate the epidemiological surveillance system prior to the onset of a natural disaster:

The Participants,

based on the experiences of Hurricanes Georges and Mitch, concluded that:

- ◆ To reduce the impact of vector-borne disease it is essential to activate the epidemiological surveillance system prior to the onset of a natural disaster.
 - ◆ The analysis of the level of preparedness in countries regarding the decentralization process of malaria programs revealed that greater social participation is needed. This is best
- carried out in phases, giving communities the opportunity to take responsibility in solving problems.
- ◆ At the time of the Conference, there had not been an increase in vector-borne diseases in the countries affected by the hurricanes. This can be explained by the behavior of the phenomena as well as by the immediate action taken to control vector breeding sites.



The Recommendations

- ◆ Each country, depending on its epidemiological situation, should take pertinent disease prevention measures before and after an event.
- ◆ Technical manuals that orient field operations teams on the control of vector-transmitted diseases should be developed and/or made available. Existing training materials should be consulted, updated and improved.
- ◆ Training on different pathologies endemic in countries should be conducted in the public and private health sectors for technical personnel, professionals in clinics, and public health workers.
- ◆ Epidemiological criteria should be employed in the use of insecticides to avoid unnecessary use in certain areas, or to avoid wasting the product.
- ◆ PAHO should carry out investigations or delegate groups of experts to analyze the use of biological pest control for the benefit of the environment and public health.
- ◆ Entomological surveillance should be expanded to establish the different vectors of communicable disease in different regions of a country, thereby allowing timely operations to prevent outbreaks. It is also important to conduct entomological surveillance both inside and outside of refugee camps or temporary settlements.
- ◆ All countries exposed to hurricanes or floods should maintain epidemiological surveillance for leptospirosis and strengthen diagnostic laboratories.
- ◆ The collection and disposal of solid waste from temporary shelters should be controlled to avoid the creation of vector breeding sites and reservoirs.



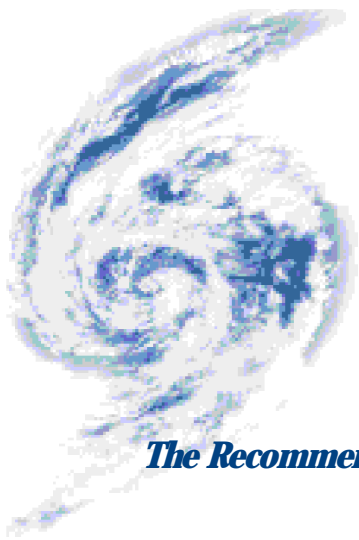
Photo: Diario El Sol (Peru)

Institutions in the water supply and sanitation sector must initiate or finalize vulnerability studies of their installations, and include this component in the development of reconstruction projects.

The Participants,

in assessing the impact of Hurricanes Georges and Mitch on water and basic sanitation systems, concluded the following:

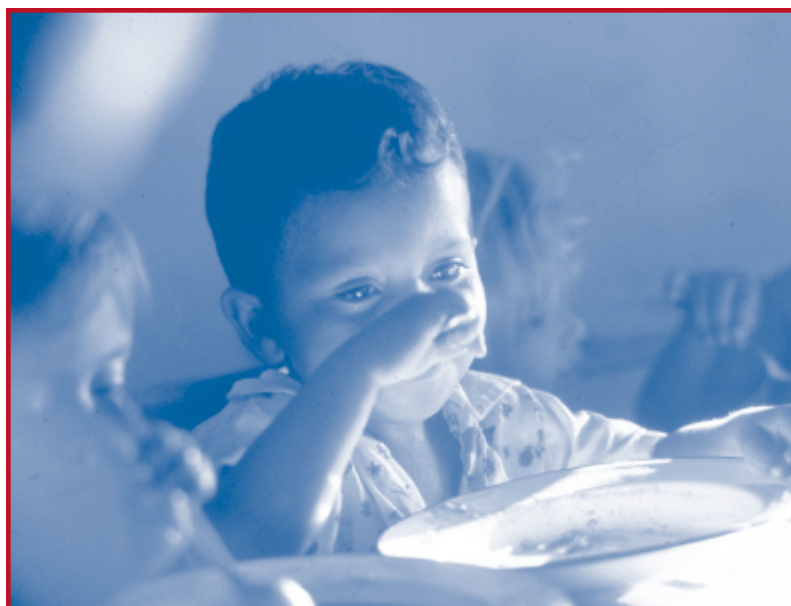
- ◆ Aqueducts, water supply and sanitation systems and infrastructure were severely damaged by the hurricanes. Vulnerability studies and information on previously installed capacity were not available.
- ◆ Rapid assessment of damage to infrastructure in the area was poorly conducted and based on unorthodox methodologies.
- ◆ In some cases, local authorities had no pre-established mechanisms for coordinating and managing information concerning damage assessment, or for identification of water supply and sanitation needs.
- ◆ The humanitarian aid received consisted primarily of materials and equipment for water treatment and supply. These comprised a vast range of technologies, many of which were unknown to the communities. Disinfection equipment was insufficient, although in some cases there were means to acquire it.
- ◆ While community participation was proven to be essential for response activities in the sector, this participation should have been coordinated by water commissions and/or neighborhood or municipal groups in order to be more effective.



The Recommendations

- ◆ Institutions in the water supply and sanitation sector must initiate or finalize vulnerability studies of their installations, and include this component in the development of reconstruction projects.
- ◆ The results from sectoral and institutional vulnerability studies should be used for the implementation of short-term mitigation activities. The development of pilot projects to measure cost-effectiveness of mitigation measures in the sector is strongly suggested.
- ◆ Water and sanitation authorities should, with the support of international organizations, improve coordination and communication mechanisms through the formulation, testing and implementation of an emergency sectoral plan that includes formal channels of communication with government and local authorities, during and after an emergency.
- ◆ Sectoral institutions must develop and perfect formal training programs for both national authorities and international cooperation on emergency management in the area, taking advantage of universities and regional institutions. New technologies should be tested by research carried out under non-emergency conditions.
- ◆ Sectoral institutions should support the government, both at the central and local levels, in the development of information systems with data on human resources, materials, equipment, and existing capacity for managing water supply and basic sanitation.
- ◆ Sectoral institutions should document their experiences in emergency management following Hurricanes Georges and Mitch, including a comparative analysis of replacement costs vs. the costs of having taken preventive mitigation and preparation measures.
- ◆ Sectoral institutions must lead community hygiene training, in coordination with the education sector, local NGOs and international organizations, using participatory methods and appropriate materials. In addition, they should make sure that national authorities include a strong education component on sanitation in every water supply and sanitation project.
- ◆ Financial and technical cooperation institutions should demand that all new water supply and sanitation projects include vulnerability reduction components.
- ◆ Governments should reinforce the process of sectoral decentralization in order to strengthen the response capacity at local levels, and to guarantee transparency and reliability in requests for humanitarian aid and for the proper channeling of international cooperation.

Photo: PAHO/WHO

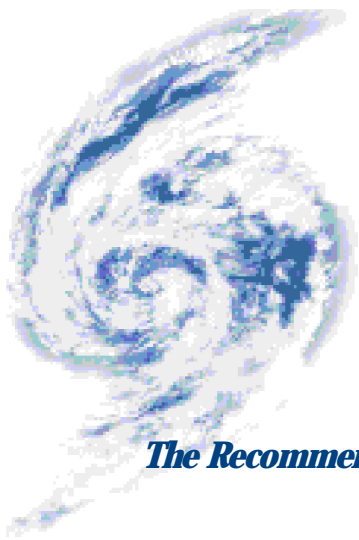


National food and nutritional policies and contingency plans for emergency situations should be developed and implemented.

The Participants,

recognizing the following problems in food and nutritional aspects, noted:

- ◆ At the national and operational levels, there exists a lack or inappropriate application of clear guidelines on procedures for food and nutritional aspects in emergency situations.
- ◆ Food supplies were often inaccessible in the most affected areas due to limited logistic resources and failures of the infrastructure.
- ◆ Inter-institutional coordination for food distribution was not adequate for some of the affected populations.
- ◆ The majority of the food reserves for immediate response depends upon donated supplies. Some of the food donations were not adequate for standard feeding patterns or were difficult to prepare in the disaster setting.
- ◆ It often was not possible to give priority attention to vulnerable groups due to limited information on their location and to the unavailability of special types of food.



The Recommendations

- ◆ National food and nutritional policies and contingency plans for emergency situations should be developed and implemented in association with PAHO/WHO.
- ◆ National governments and communities should allocate funds for the provision of food during emergencies.
- ◆ The national capacity for the provision of food should be strengthened through:
 - The creation of a committee for inter-institutional coordination;
 - Training of human resources, including at the local level; and
 - Development of distribution and transportation networks at regional and local levels.
- ◆ The National disaster organization responsible for the coordination and distribution of food should promote the use of SUMA or other systems for the integral management of food based on the need for transparency and accountability.
- ◆ The national government should assist the local communities with implementation of a food and nutritional security strategy.
- ◆ The WFP should provide easily accessible lists of essential food and complementary items for emergency circumstances, should assist the national coordinating agency in limiting the period of free food assistance, and should promote the implementation of productive and/or reconstruction activities.
- ◆ PAHO/WHO, UNICEF, and the WFP must establish/strengthen an ongoing system of food-nutritional surveillance with each country.