Ruptured areas (marked with ovals of different colors) for different earthquakes in the recent past. These

The probability of strong earthquakes in Mexico—particularly along the Guerrero Fault on the Pacific coast—is very high. Because of the accumulated energy in that region, one or more earthquakes of magnitude-8 or higher in the Richter scale are expected in the near future. The tremors that have shaken the country in recent weeks are an indication of the high seismic activity in this geographic area.

The Mexican authorities have worked for several decades in developing disaster risk reduction and preparedness measures to face disasters such as the one caused by the 1985 earthquake, when dozens of thousands of people died and the referral hospitals collapsed in Mexico City. The earthquakes of 2010 in Haiti and Chile were a wakeup call for countries in the Americas to be better prepared to face these phenomena.

Through a presidential mandate, in 2011 the Federal Plan for Preparedness and Response to a Large-scale Earthquake or Tsunami in Mexico (also called the Earthquake Plan) was launched. Under the framework of the National System of Civil Protection, the plan was created with support from more than 30 federal agencies. It will provide support and consistency to the

implementation of all institutional response plans and the collective initiatives of civil society and the private sector to improve the response capacity and execute response actions in case of earthquakes.

Forty hospitals in eight states—in the highest seismic zone—were identified to be essential, due to their level of complexity and resolution capacity. These facilities must continue to be functional after an earthquake; therefore, based on the results of the application of the Hospital Safety Index, interventions have been prioritized to improve their safety. Fifty other hospitals in six federal areas, determined to be located in the second level of risk, according to the Earthquake Plan, were also evaluated. Of the 90 hospitals evaluated, 70% have been rated in Category A, 20% in Category B, and 10% in Category C.

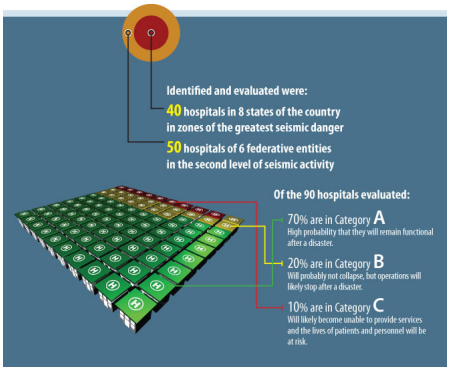
The results of the application of the Hospital Safety Index help in the preparation of accurate response plans that include priority mobilization of health teams to areas where hospitals are likely to stop working. This way lost emergency services will be covered and more lives will be saved, reducing permanent disability and protecting the health of the population in affected areas.

Mexico has targeted the safety level of hospitals to include it in their System for the Analysis and Visualization of Risks (SAVER), and analyze hospital safety using hazard maps. This will be a valuable tool for better decision-making on risk reduction, preparedness and disaster response.

The Government of Mexico is working with PAHO/WHO and other UN agencies in identifying mechanisms for international humanitarian assistance. Also, as part of the implementation of the Earthquake Plan, a large-scale simulation exercise was conducted in
Chiapas
last March. It had the participation of the three levels of the Mexican Government, hospitals, civil defense forces from several countries, and the general population. This is definitely an example to follow.

You can download the full document here (Plan sismo - Mexico).

For more information contact Ciro Ugarte (ugarteci@paho.org).


Identified and evaluated were:
40 hospitals in 8 states of the country
in zones of the greatest seismic danger
50 hospitals of 6 federative entities
in the second level of seismic activity
Of the 90 hospitals evaluated:
70% are in Category A
High probability that they will remain functional after a disaster.
20% are in Category B
Will probably not collapse, but operations will likely stop after a disaster.
10% are in Category C
Will likely become unable to provide services and the lives of patients and personnel will be at risk.