

# REACH MEDIA BULLETIN

## OCTOBER 2022



## HAITI

Cholera outbreak in Haiti: The latest amongst an unprecedented global surge

2022 has seen an **unprecedented** number of cholera outbreaks worldwide, as climate-related risks like floods and droughts, on top of ongoing conflicts and displacement, have impacted access to clean water in many fragile contexts. Since January, **29 countries have reported cholera cases**, compared to fewer than 20 countries on average over the previous five years. The surge in cases has raised concerns over vaccine shortages, leading the International Coordinating Group, which manages emergency vaccine stocks, to **temporarily adopt a single-dose regimen** rather than the standard two-dose approach.

Haiti now joins this growing list of countries, with national authorities **confirming the first two cases** on 2 October – more than a decade since its first-ever recorded outbreak. As of 24 October, Haiti's Ministry of Health has **reported 207 confirmed cases**, as well as 1,972 suspected cases, 27 deaths in cholera treatment facilities, and 14 deaths within the community. This is in addition to 12 confirmed cases, 271 suspected cases, and 14 deaths in the national penitentiary. Most suspected cases are concentrated to the capital, Port-au-Prince, and Cité Soleil, both in the Ouest department.

### What is cholera?

According to the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, cholera is a disease caused by bacteria that can be found in faeces, and spreads through people consuming contaminated water or food. It causes severe watery diarrhoea and vomiting which lead to dehydration. If treated immediately, less than 1% of cases result in patients dying. However, if timely treatment is not available, cholera can lead to death within hours in 25 to 50% of cases.

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## Haiti is experiencing a multi-faceted humanitarian crisis, but current funding levels are insufficient to address rising food security and health needs.

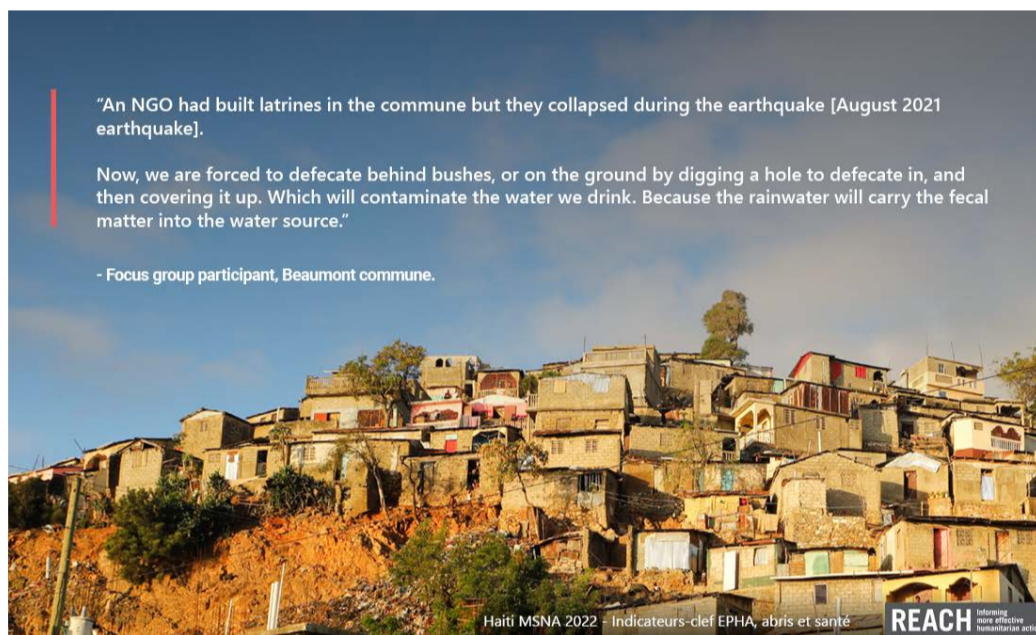
No stranger to environmental hazards and the impacts of climate change, Haiti is still grappling with the **fallout from a 7.2 magnitude earthquake in August 2021**. Now in the midst of hurricane season, the country continues to face widespread poverty, the rise in insecurity and violence from armed groups, and recurring political instability. **The 2022 Global Humanitarian Overview** projected 4.9 million people – over 40% of the total population – to be in need of assistance, highlighting protection issues, displacement, food insecurity, malnutrition, and low access to basic services. However as of September, Haiti's Humanitarian Response Plan was **only 22%** funded, putting it among the countries with the largest funding gaps.

- **Recent analysis** from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the global body that determines the magnitude and severity of food insecurity and malnutrition, points to a worsening situation: 48% of the population were found to be facing 'emergency' levels of food insecurity or higher (IPC Phase 3+), an increase from 44% of the population in 2021.
- The IPC analysis also found that 5% of the population of Cité Soleil – where nearly half of suspected cholera cases are located – are facing 'catastrophic' levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 5, **defined** as an extreme lack of food and where starvation, death, and destitution are evident). This is the first time this year that any households in Haiti were found to be in Phase 5, again pointing to a worsening situation for the country.

## Households across the country are relying on unsafe water sources and have limited access to appropriate sanitation infrastructure, raising the risk of cholera spreading further in the country.

According to **data collected by REACH** between June and September:

- **Nationwide, nearly one-in-four households (24%) reported using unprotected springs, wells, or surface water for drinking.** Use of surface water was highest in Sud Est (10% of households), Nord Est, and Centre (both 9%) regions. In GrandAnse, one of the areas most affected by last year's earthquake, 7% of households reported surface water as their main drinking water source, particularly concerning as 51% of households reported the practice of open defecation.



- **40% of households nationwide reported open defecation or defecation in open pits as their primary sanitation infrastructure.** In Cité Soleil, a current cholera hotspot, 49% of households reported regular use of open pits and 4% open defecation.

## Insufficient health infrastructure and reduced availability of health services are likely to impact timely access to cholera treatment, thereby increasing the risk of deaths.

- Haiti is currently experiencing a fuel crisis, made worse by the monthlong **blockade of Varreux oil terminal** by armed groups. These fuel shortages are impacting the ability of hospitals to remain open and maintain critical services.
- Ongoing unrest and violence from armed groups also limit access to health services, as both health workers and those seeking treatment are facing movement restrictions. These mobility challenges are also **impacting the delivery of aid** to vulnerable people.

"I had a child who was suffering from a hemorrhage. I had to go to Jérémie on motorcycle with him. My child almost succumbed to his illness, just because we don't have access to a health center that really works.

If there was a functional health center at section level, I would not have spent that money in Jérémie, but at home."

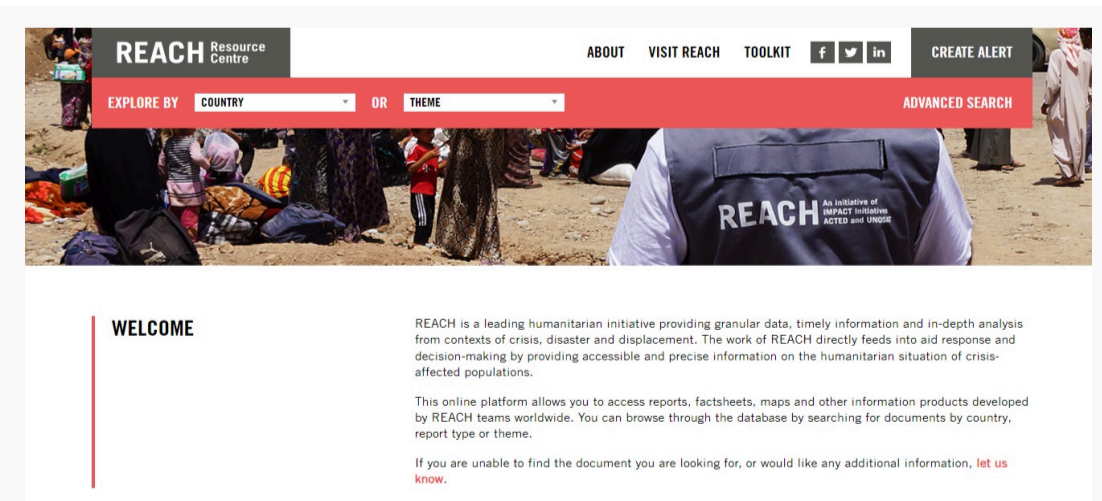
- Focus group participant, Beaumont commune.

According to REACH data:

- Most households in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area (69%), the current epicentre of the cholera outbreak, **reported relying on a fuel-based mode of transportation for accessing health facilities** – notably 29% relying on public transport and 28% on motorbikes and motorbike taxis.
- In Sud Est and GrandAnse regions, the average travel time to a health facility was reportedly 74 and 68 minutes respectively – and in rural areas of Sud Est, 92 minutes. The **SPHERE** minimum humanitarian standard is under one hour.

### Further reading

- Haiti Multi-Sector Needs Assessment: **WASH, Health, and Shelter brief**
- Haiti Multi-Sector Needs Assessment: **Accountability to Affected Populations factsheet**
- Haiti Multi-Sector Needs Assessment **Dashboard**
- **Profile of Grand'Anse:** Persisting needs 9 months after the earthquake



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