

Case study: Cholera and the Ministry of Public Health

The Ministry of Public Health in Haiti launched a communication response to the outbreak of cholera as soon as the disease was confirmed on October 21st 2010. The first press conferences on the epidemic and the response were held by local authorities in Artibonite, Haiti's largest *departement*¹, without support from international partners.

Central to the Ministry of Public Health response were daily press briefings hosted by the Ministry of Culture and Communications in their press facility. Every day, the ministry announced the latest mortality and hospitalisation figures, and made senior figures in the government available to the press. They also invited UN and NGO partners to share the platform, and made a point of including cholera experts who could answer technical questions on the disease. In particular, they included key questions made by Haitians during calls to the government *300 cholera hotline in each press briefing, so they could be answered in public by the experts on the panel.

The press conferences were simultaneously broadcast live across key Haitian radio networks and television. The Ministry of Public Health also led an effort to organise a seven-hour multiplex programme on cholera, led by President Preval, and broadcast across all key networks.

By November 10th the Ministry of Public Health had approved two posters and finalised 12 radio spots. The ministry also worked with mobile phone company, Digicel, to blast SMS across their subscriber base, with messaging also used by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in their SMS project with Digicel.

They also set up an information phone line in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Communication, taking calls from the affected population. This was understaffed – in the initial days only four people were available to take calls, none of whom were cholera specialists. Aside from the questions feeding back into the press conferences, there is no available data to measure use or impact.

¹ Administrative division – there are 10 *departements* in Haiti.