The flash floods in Solomon Islands on April 3-5 caused significant damage to the people of Honiara and Guadalcanal Province. Photo: WHO/R. Kenitahana

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- On 3-5 April 2014, heavy rains poured over Solomon Islands and resulted in massive flooding in the capital city of Honiara and the rest of the Guadalcanal province.
- The disaster has left people dead and thousands more affected with the loss of homes, livelihoods and basic infrastructures.
- The Government declared a state of emergency in Honiara and the rest of Guadalcanal province.
- Health services delivery in affected areas are hampered. Health priorities include access to safe water and sanitation facilities, nutrition and food safety, maternal and child health services, mental health and psychosocial support, preventing the spread of communicable diseases as well as environmental sanitation.
The World Health Organization (WHO), in support of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS), is coordinating all health-related aspects of the emergency response. WHO works with MHMS as co-lead of health cluster in responding to the health needs of the affected communities. The first Health Cluster Coordination meeting was held on 10 April 2014.

WHO has deployed staff to the field to provide technical support in health cluster coordination, disease surveillance, food safety, risk assessment, risk communications and water and sanitation.

HEALTH IMPACTS
(Source: Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Solomon Islands)
Population Data: Solomon Islands – 515,870; Honiara – 64,609; Guadalcanal Province – 93,613

- The capital city of Honiara has 12,000 people affected by the flooding. More than 2,000 people are staying in Panatina Pavilion evacuation center in Honiara and around 1,000 at both the Festival of the Pacific Arts Centre and King George VI School.

- In Guadalcanal Province, an estimated 40,000 people were affected. River systems across the northwest, central and north of the island were flooded, destroying homes, damaging bridges and displacing families. There are also reports of landslides and loss of food gardens.

- Other provinces are starting to report impacts, but there is still limited communication to many areas.

- The major health issues in these evacuation centres include problems associated with reproductive health and child health issues including possible cases of food insecurity, moderate and severe acute malnutrition, food safety, water and sanitation facilities (one toilet per a thousand people), and possible risks of infectious diseases.

- Water quality is an ongoing issue as several water sources in Honiara and Guadalcanal have been contaminated or destroyed. Addressing this issue is an urgent need.

- The need for mental health and psycho-social support (MHSSS), including emergency mental health services at the evacuation centres and the flood affected communities, is increasingly becoming an issue.

- There are 10 health facilities reportedly damaged from the flooding: 3 out of 9 in Honiara and 7 out of 37 in Guadalcanal Province. Assessments of the health facilities in Guadalcanal are still ongoing. Responding to health needs of the affected communities and restoring the health services will pose a tremendous challenge to the health sector.
The Government of Solomon Islands has declared a state of emergency in Honiara and the rest of Guadalcanal province. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) has requested the deployment of Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) clusters and coordination support from the United Nations.

The Ministry of Health Emergency Operations Centre (MHEOC) was activated. In a few days, it was able to deploy three doctors and 10 nurses each to both Honiara City Council and the Guadalcanal Province.

The government priority is the restoration of people’s access to health care through reconstruction and rehabilitation of the affected health facilities.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS), in partnership with WHO, has activated the health cluster and works with partners in addressing the concerns of the affected communities and those in evacuation centres, such as the access to water and sanitation facilities in evacuation centers. Meetings are held on a daily basis to identify emerging issues, gaps in healthcare delivery and solutions required in order to address them.

The government is in the process of strengthening the Early Warning and Response System (EWARS) in Honiara and Guadalcanal for early detection of possible outbreak of diseases. Routine measles immunisation continues to be implemented by the MHMS.

An Initial Rapid Assessment (IRA) tool for Health was finalized and teams were trained in using the tool. Assessments have been conducted and the data analysis is ongoing.

The National Disaster Operation Committee (NDOC), in cooperation with different organizations, is leading the development of the Solomon Islands Flash Flood Humanitarian Action Plan.

As of 14 April 2014, the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) has encouraged those in evacuation centers to return to their homes, and concentrate on rebuilding their homes and livelihood.
**Honiara City Council (HCC)**

- Mobile teams have been deployed to the 31 evacuation centres in order to perform health assessments and deliver curative care. Six clinics are currently providing services while three clinics have been closed (Mataniko, Pikini Clinic and White River).

- Three of the nine health facilities have been damaged. Currently, three mobile teams are providing medical services around HCC, including consultation related to maternal and child health (MCH) and nutrition. Communication materials were also provided along with the mobile teams.

- There is an urgent need for counselling services at Mbokona as evacuees are searching for bodies and/or their family members.

- More than 4,300 long-lasting insecticide-treated nets (LLIN) have been distributed in evacuation centres in Honiara and has also begun in Guadalcanal Province. In addition, eight of the larger evacuation centres in Honiara have had interior and exterior residual treatments of insecticide, to protect against malaria and dengue vectors. Ultra low volume (ULV) fogging is also being regularly carried out around all major evacuation centers, targeting dengue vectors at their peak biting time.

- A team from the MHMS have started the assessment on vaccines and cold storage facilities for a plan to conduct measles and polio immunisation.

**Guadalcanal Province (GP)**

- Seven of the 37 health facilities were affected in Guadalcanal and assessment in 16 facilities have already been conducted; these assessments are ongoing. Five teams have been deployed to perform the field assessments and provide curative services.

- Several boreholes and wells have been affected by the flooding and access to potable water is an issue. Cases of diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory infection (ARI) have been reported with one death due to severe pneumonia.

- Mosquito nets have also been distributed to Marara and Henderson area, and ULV fogging has been conducted at two of the major evacuation centres. It was recommended to re-distribute the LLIN to the residents who were affected by floods and, do not have their previously distributed nets. Fogging was also conducted in affected communities to prevent vector-borne diseases.

- Communities have been provided with information materials related to: (i) home care of diarrhoea; (ii) red eye, (iii) trachoma, (iv) dengue chart, (v) dengue home care.

Matthew Shortus, WHO entomologist and Malaria Scientist, supports the Vector Borne Disease Control Program staff of Guadalcanal Province, in fogging operations in a community affected by floods. Photo: WHO/JRC
WHO RESPONSE

- The World Health Organization (WHO) is closely working with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) at the central and provincial levels in coordinating the health response to this emergency. It supports MHMS in ensuring that the health services provided by partners and other organizations go to where it is needed.

- As part of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT), WHO leads the health cluster response and coordinates with OCHA in the provision of the UN-wide support.

- WHO collaborates with MHMS in representing the health and nutrition sub-cluster of the National Disaster Operation Committee (NDOC)’s Welfare Cluster. It is currently assisting the government in the development of the Humanitarian Action Plan for Health and Nutrition.

- WHO technical specialists have been working closely with the officials in various departments/divisions of the MHMS in responding to health sector needs including preventive, and curative services, public health, vector control, food safety and nutrition, strengthening surveillance system, conducting risk assessments, and risk communication. It also supported the MHMS in developing the health facility assessments tools and in conducting the health facility assessments.

- In response to the request of the MHMS, additional specialists have been deployed to Solomon Islands to provide support in the following areas:
  - rapid post-disaster epidemic risk assessment
  - health cluster disaster coordination
  - strengthening early warning disease surveillance
  - food safety and nutrition assessment and action
  - emergency communications assessment and support

- One of the priorities of WHO at this stage is the strengthening of the surveillance system to effectively detect post-disaster risk and potential impact of an epidemic of a number of diseases. This is being done in close collaboration with MHMS.

- WHO collaborates closely with development partners and the donor community in supporting the MHMS in both the initial response as well as health system recovery stages.
HEALTH PRIORITIES

The floods in Solomon Islands disrupted the delivery of health services in clinics severely damaged in Honiara and Guadalcanal Province. Although the basic life-saving services have been dispensed, the health concerns are huge and complicated.

Based on the initial results of the health assessment, the principal health issues are:

- lack of food, water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and related food and water-borne illnesses,
- problems associated with food availability and food safety,
- malnutrition, especially of infants and young children, leading to increased and more severe disease;
- respiratory infections associated with overcrowding, especially acute respiratory infections in children;
- mental health and psychosocial conditions;
- leptospirosis from exposure to rodent excreta or contaminated water;
- vector-borne diseases, especially malaria and dengue

Given the health issues, the immediate priorities are:

- the provision of safe and nutritious food, safe drinking water, appropriate sanitation, shelter, and other essential non-food items including fuel for cooking;
- provision of medicines and medical supplies;
- strengthening surveillance system for infectious diseases;
- prevention of vector-borne diseases;
- risk communication to the public.

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