HIGHLIGHTS

• The most powerful cyclone the South Pacific has seen in over a decade, Cyclone Pam has affected over half of Vanuatu’s population of 268,000, and threatens to overwhelm the country’s already fragile health system.

• The WHO is working closely with the Ministry of Health of Vanuatu, international partners and aid organizations to assess damage and coordinate response efforts.

• This category 5 cyclone has caused widespread, severe damage and loss of life through the country, particularly in the central and southern regions, which experienced the brunt of the storm.

• The Government of Vanuatu has declared a state of emergency and requested help from the international community.

• The full health impact of Cyclone Pam is not yet clear as communications systems are still unreliable and access to other areas remains largely blocked.

• Medical personnel, emergency responders, search and rescue staff and supplies have arrived from neighbouring countries over the last two day.
• A comprehensive health needs assessment is underway that will allow the WHO to work with Ministry of Health to guide the deployment of health and emergency resources in order to provide care where it is needed most.

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

HEALTH IMPACT

Vila Central Hospital

• The Vila Central Hospital (VCH) is the main tertiary hospital in Vanuatu and it was significantly damaged and portions of it were flooded.

• There is limited space to accommodate new patients, which are expected increase as roads are cleared and transportation resumes. As of 16 March, the VCH currently has 68 inpatients, and more than 120 outpatients have visited the facility since the cyclone hit.

• Only a limited number of health centres and dispensaries are accessible. People seeking care have been going to the VCH, raising concerns about overcrowding.

• Temporary tents are being set up in the VCH car park to accommodate the increasing numbers. Options are being investigated for isolating patients and for ensuring privacy.

Evacuation Centres

• About 3,300 people have been displaced in Port Vila and many are staying in the 37 evacuation centres. Food and water supplies are reported to be low at many of these centres and sanitary conditions are reported to be poor as well.

• WHO is working with the Ministry of Health and other partners to assess the challenges at these centres and address them as quickly as possible.

Disease Surveillance

• There is a significant risk that infectious diseases will spread due to flooding, poor sanitary conditions and limited medical care.

• Among the diseases of concern are diarrheal disease, dengue fever, influenza, and measles. A measles outbreak was ongoing before the cyclone. The WHO and
Ministry of Health are resuming an immunization campaign against measles to reduce its spread.

- The WHO and Ministry of Health have set up a disease surveillance system to help quickly identify any outbreaks.

Other Health Needs:

- Needs also include child and maternal health services to support EPI and nutrition; sexual and reproductive health; non-communicable diseases such as treatments for hypertension and diabetes; and mental health services to support those dealing with the trauma of this event.

- The WHO is working with the Ministry of Health and other partners to assess how best to address these needs so they can be met as quickly as possible.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

- Health sector partners are meeting regularly to assess health needs, identify priorities and action a timely health response.

- Vanuatu has declared a state of emergency in the southern province of Shefa. It is likely to be extended to Tafea and other provinces as information becomes available.

- The International airport in Port Vila is now receiving international flights and several have arrived carrying health and emergency personnel and supplies.

- Phones and communication networks throughout the country are down in many places, making it difficult to collect information from the many affected islands and coordinate a response.

- The National Emergency Operating Centre of Vanuatu, in coordination with the WHO and the Ministry of Health, is managing the information gathering, initial response and planning for assessments. They are also coordinating assistance to people living in evacuation centres.

- The National Emergency Operating Centre, in coordination with the Ministry of Health and the WHO, is directing the efforts to re-establish essential health services.

- Relief agencies, in coordination with the WHO and the Ministry of Health, are conducting first assessments in accessible areas on the islands of Efate and Tanna.

- The National Emergency Operating Centre has formed an Evacuation Centres Working Group to ensure that the safety, protection and needs of the evacuees are addressed as quickly as possible.
• The Working Group is comprised of Vanuatu Red Cross, Protection, Gender and Disability, WASH and Logistics specialists to manage assessments and get assistance to people where required.

WHO RESPONSE

• Working closely with the Ministry of Health of Vanuatu, international partner governments, including Australia and New Zealand, and international aid organizations, including UNICEF, to coordinate relief efforts.

• Activated its Emergency Operations Centre and put a support team of multi-disciplinary experts in place to assess needs and deploy critical resources to help in the response.

• Sending health and emergency response experts, medical supplies and other equipment to Vanuatu to assist in the response.

• In regular contact with the governments of Australia and New Zealand, as well as with several UN and other aid organizations, to help ensure Vanuatu gets the right resources to meet their health needs.

• Working the Ministry of Health and UNICEF to conduct an immunization campaign to address a measles outbreak that began before the cyclone struck.

CONTACT

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