

## COVID-19 Coronavirus in Haiti

**PORT-AU-PRINCE, JUNE 4, 2020**—The number of people testing positive for the coronavirus in Haiti has spiked dramatically from 100 cases to more than 2,600 cases and 50 deaths in less than a month, said the medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders (DWB) on June 4, 2020. The real numbers are likely much higher, said DWB, which opened the Drouillard COVID-19 treatment center in Port-au-Prince on May 16. There are currently only two laboratories in the country able to process COVID-19 tests, and people seeking treatment at DWB's COVID-19 center are arriving late and in critically ill condition.

DWB has been caring for patients suffering from the most severe cases of the virus. Its teams are currently treating 25 patients in the center, many of whom are critically ill.

“Some patients come to us with positive test results, and others who are in need of oxygen or hospitalization are treated as we send their test to a government-run laboratory,” said Hassan Issa, DWB's head of mission in Haiti.

There were originally 20 beds in the facility, but that has been expanded to a capacity of 45 beds to meet the needs. More than 150 patients have been registered, nearly half of whom have been admitted to the hospital. Approximately 50 others have been monitored on an outpatient basis by DWB teams.

The capital, Port-au-Prince, with a population of four million, is the epicenter of the disease, with nearly 75 percent of the total cases reported and 60 percent of the deaths. Sixty percent of the cases reported are between the age of 20-44, and 27 percent are between 45-65 years of age.

In Port-au-Prince as well as in the south of the country—specifically Port-à-Piment and Port-Salut—DWB has set up triage spaces and isolation units for COVID-19 patients in all health structures the organization supports. DWB has also installed a triage space and an isolation unit with a capacity of 10 beds in the main hospital in Les Cayes, located in the south of the country.

COVID-19 cases have been reported in all ten departments in the country, and the Haitian government has declared a state of emergency and is asking people to practice social distancing and wear masks. However, it has been impossible for most people to follow the measures, particularly those who live in the densely populated slums of the capital, where the highest number of cases have been reported.

Among the many challenges facing the country is the ongoing return of thousands of Haitian migrants from the neighboring Dominican Republic, which has the largest cluster of COVID-19 cases in the Caribbean, with more than 17,000 registered cases.

DWB is also concerned that many people with COVID-19 symptoms are not going to the hospital for treatment, which will fuel the spread in communities and reduce individuals' chances of survival.

“As the spread of the virus accelerates, so does the stigma surrounding it,” Issa said. “Unfortunately, a dozen patients have died on arrival at the hospital, and many others have arrived in critically ill condition. In light of that, we continue to carry out health promotion activities and call on those who have COVID-19 symptoms to seek immediate care as it can greatly improve their chance of being treated successfully.”

There are fears the Haitian health care system—which is already fragile—is ill-prepared to deal with the widening pandemic. In some communities, centers set up to receive coronavirus patients have been attacked. In addition, several health facilities have closed due to a lack of protective equipment and contamination of staff, making access to obstetric, pediatric, and trauma care difficult. The provision of personal protective equipment in those structures is essential to allow continuity of care and protect staff.

Additionally, with the huge demand on laboratories for tests and longer wait times for results, the issue of testing is increasingly becoming an important challenge to control the spread of the disease and provide adequate and timely care to those who test positive.

*DWB has been working in Haiti since 1991, providing basic health care to the public and responding to natural disasters and epidemics.*

<https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/haiti-msf-raises-alarm-over-rapid-spike-new-cases-covid-19>