

Health official: No sign of Haiti diphtheria spike

May 10 2010

(AP) -- A 15-year-old boy has died of diphtheria in Haiti, but there is no evidence the bacterial disease is spreading in the earthquake-ravaged country, U.N. health officials said Sunday.

The boy, a survivor of the Jan. 12 earthquake, died last week despite receiving antitoxin treatments, said Anshu Banerjee, an official with the [World Health Organization](#).

The case sparked fears of an outbreak after CNN reported the death during an interview with actor Sean Penn, who is helping manage a tarp-and-tent camp in the capital, Port-au-Prince. A caption accompanying a story on CNN's website said: "Diphtheria epidemic threatens Haiti."

But Banerjee said the case was isolated, antibiotics were distributed to the boy's neighbors and no other cases of the contagious respiratory disease had been diagnosed.

"So far as we see it, this is just an isolated case and there are no other cases," said Banerjee, coordinator for a committee of international organizations and Haitian officials overseeing health issues in the quake zone.

But he added that concerns about the threat of [infectious diseases](#) breaking out across quake-ravaged areas are well-founded. Many of the 1.3 million people displaced by the magnitude-7 quake are living in squalid camps where infection can spread easily.

A total of 900,000 people in quake-affected areas were vaccinated against [diphtheria](#) and other diseases in a campaign that ended last month. Another mass campaign is planned for June.

Officials are especially concerned about widespread [diarrhea](#), which can be fatal for children, and increased levels of mosquito-borne [malaria](#).

Eds: CORRECTS subject-verb agreement in 6th graf.

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