

# Death toll from cholera surpasses 500 in Haiti: official

November 7 2010

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The death toll from Haiti's cholera epidemic has surpassed 500 dead, the Haitian Health Ministry reported on its website Saturday.

The ministry's latest numbers showed the number of dead rising to 501, from 442 on November 3, and hospitalizations for cholera now totaling 7,359, up from 6,742.

Although easily treated, cholera has a short [incubation period](#) -- sometimes just a few hours -- and causes acute watery diarrhea that can quickly lead to severe [dehydration](#) and death.

The outbreak was the first time cholera was confirmed in Haiti in decades.

Authorities now fear that the epidemic could accelerate as it is borne by floods and standing water left by Tomas, which swept Haiti with hurricane force on Friday.

Some 1.3 million people out of a population of just under 10 million are living in tents, refugee camps and under the open sky. Aid agencies warn that [cholera](#) could spread like wildfire in such conditions, with people living elbow-to-elbow, cooking and bathing in close quarters.

Haiti was the poorest country in the Americas even prior to the January 2010 earthquake that killed some 250,000 people and flattened much of the capital.

In some local hospitals, patients were washing their hands with freshly cut lemons, believing this would help disinfect them. Aid agencies and the Haitian government were urging further steps to prevent the outbreak's spread, with anti-bacterial lotion and tools to prepare food without infected water.

The source of the [cholera outbreak](#) remains unclear, though the UN peacekeeping force MINUSTAH was investigating claims its septic tanks leaked into the Artibonite River and contaminated it with [fecal bacteria](#).

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