

Cholera cases climb to 111 in Venezuela

January 31 2011

(AP) -- The number of cholera cases has jumped to 111 in Venezuela as more people tested positive after attending a wedding with contaminated food in the Dominican Republic, the country's health minister said Friday.

The patients were all receiving treatment, and 27 were hospitalized, Health Minister Eugenia Sader told the Caracas-based television network Telesur.

The number of cases rose swiftly on Friday. Venezuelan authorities had said a day earlier that 37 people had the virus in the country and that 12 others were hospitalized in the Dominican Republic.

Dominican officials said wedding guests became infected when they ate tainted lobster at a wedding Jan. 22. Health Minister Bautista Rojas said lobsters for the lavish celebration were bought in Pedernales, a town bordering Haiti, where more than 3,000 people have died from a [cholera epidemic](#).

Many of the 452 guests were Venezuelans, and health officials hope to provide treatment to all of them to keep the illness from spreading, Sader said. She has said several who returned to Madrid, Mexico and Boston also have cholera.

The Massachusetts health department said Friday that six state residents tested positive after attending the wedding, but all were released from local hospitals and officials were not concerned the disease could spread.

Jose Rodriguez, a vice minister in the Dominican Health Department, said the wedding menu consisted of 25 dishes, so not everyone ate the lobster.

Clemente Terrero, an infectious disease specialist and member of the Dominican Medical Association, questioned the reliability of government statistics on cholera.

"It is not possible that so many people became infected with cholera at one party, and that only 300 cases have been reported in the Dominican Republic in three months," he said.

Cholera fears have led to mass deportations of Haitian migrants since the beginning of the year. One death has been reported in the Dominican Republic.

Cholera, which causes severe diarrhea that can lead to dehydration and death, is spread through fecal-contaminated water and food. It had been rare in the Americas recently, until the outbreak in Haiti.

A large outbreak centered in Peru in 1991 spread to other countries and a total of 396,536 cases were reported throughout the Americas that year, according to the Pan American Health Organization. However a massive public health program subsequently helped all but eliminate the disease in the region, with just 13 known cases in 2006.

Before this month, [Venezuela](#) had not reported any [cholera](#) cases since 2000.

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