

Cuba's first cholera outbreak in 130 years kills three

July 3 2012

An outbreak of cholera in eastern Cuba has killed at least three people, 130 years after the last known case of the disease was reported on the island.

Health workers have identified 53 people infected with the illness in the coastal town of Manzanillo.

In a statement published in the official newspaper Granma, Cuba's ministry of public health said in a statement that the three fatalities were elderly people aged 66, 70 and 95.

Authorities said about a thousand people were receiving preventative medical treatment in Manzanillo, a town of some 130,000 inhabitants.

Health officials said they believe heavy rains and hot temperatures contributed to the outbreak of cholera, an intestinal ailment which is spread through contaminated food and water.

The ailment causes serious diarrhea and vomiting, leading to dehydration. It is easily treatable by rehydration and antibiotics, but can be fatal if not treated in time.

The outbreak is a matter of particular concern in Cuba, which prides itself on having one of the region's most admired public health systems, which is seen as one of the successes of its half-century old communist regime.

The last patient known to fall ill of cholera in Cuba was Manuel Jimenez Fuentes, who died of the disease in 1882, when the island was still a Spanish colony.

Nearby Haiti has been battling a devastating cholera epidemic since October 2010. It was Haiti's first outbreak in decades and has been widely blamed on a camp of UN peacekeepers from Nepal. More than 7,500 people in the impoverished nation have died since the outbreak erupted there.

The disease has also spread to the wealthier Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, where more than 20,000 cases and 360 deaths have also been reported.

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