

Venezuela urged to stop spread of measles, diphtheria

June 23 2018

The Pan American Health Organization on Friday painted a bleak picture of Venezuela's healthcare system, calling for urgent action to stop the transmission of measles and diphtheria amid an intensifying crisis that has seen an exodus of doctors.

The Americas were declared measles-free in 2016, but the [viral disease](#), which causes pneumonia, [brain swelling](#) and death made a comeback in Venezuela last year, according to PAHO, which is the regional office for the World Health Organization.

The first case was confirmed in July 2017 but as of June 2018 that figure has risen to 2,285, with [cases](#) in 21 of Venezuela's 24 states and the federal capital.

In a report, PAHO blamed a breakdown in vaccine coverage, "leaving pockets of susceptible population," as well as inadequate monitoring and management.

There has also been a major outbreak of diphtheria, a bacterial infection that makes it difficult to breathe and in severe cases causes heart and nerve damage, with 1,086 cases confirmed from 2016-18 and a confirmed [fatality rate](#) of 14.7 percent.

The malaria rate, meanwhile, increased almost four-fold from 2015 to 2017, which had 406,289 cases.

President Nicolas Maduro's socialist government is in the midst of an ever-deepening crisis with food and medicine in short supply.

That in turn has led to "a progressive loss of operational capacity in the national [health](#) system," the report said, with the Venezuelan Medical Federation estimating that approximately 22,000 physicians have migrated out of the country.

The figure represents a third of the country's 66,138 doctors reported in 2014.

More than 1.6 million Venezuelans fled in 2017, raising public health concerns in several neighboring countries, notably Colombia, Guyana, Ecuador and Trinidad and Tobago, the report said.

But the report also noted Venezuela continues to have significant healthcare capacity despite the challenges and was expanding its response to the outbreaks with assistance from PAHO.

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