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FEATURED Q&A

What Health Risks Are Facing Storm-Hit Puerto Rico?



In the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, Puerto Ricans are facing serious health concerns, due to a lack of clean water as well as reduced access to medical care. The hospital ship USNS Comfort is pictured arriving in San Juan on Tuesday. // Photo: U.S. Air Force.

Q Two weeks after Hurricane Maria, 95 percent of Puerto Ricans are still living without electricity, putting the sick at risk. Following the hurricane, the island's main medical center was off the electricity grid, health care workers were unable to get to hospitals because of fuel shortages and some medical centers were running low on medicine and supplies. What are the biggest health risks facing Puerto Rico in the wake of the hurricane? What should local governments and international aid organizations do to help mitigate this growing crisis in the region? What steps need to be taken to make health care systems throughout the Caribbean Basin more resilient against future natural disasters?

A Ricardo Izurieta, associate professor of global health, and Ismael Hoare, assistant professor of global health, both at the University of South Florida: "Puerto Rico's health system is coping with the impact of two major hurricanes. Access to its health care system has been restricted, with 74 percent of hospitals opened and 13 percent reconnected to the electric grid. With a limited number of pharmacies opened, patients with chronic diseases are most at risk of complications, due to a lack of medication and access to care, compounded by reduced mobility, and with only 50 percent accessible road infrastructure. The long-term health impacts of the environmental disasters will be associated with water. Puerto Rico is suffering from a scarcity of safe water, while immense bodies of stagnant water have become reservoirs for water-borne gastro-enteric pathogens (such as Vibrio cholera, Escherichia coli, Salmonella, and Leptospira), and for

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The body of the last person known to be missing was pulled from the rubble of a collapsed building.

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The trade deficit has risen amid high costs and a strong peso, leading to pressure on President Mauricio Macri to cut taxes or allow the currency to fall.

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Russia Would Provide Venezuela Military Support: Maduro

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, who is visiting Moscow, expressed confidence that Russia would come to its aid with military support if necessary. Maduro's comments followed remarks in August by U.S. President Donald Trump that he wasn't ruling out a "military option" in Venezuela.

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Maduro // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Russia Would Provide Venezuela Military Support: Maduro

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro expressed confidence on Wednesday that Russia would provide his country with military support if necessary, McClatchy reported. Maduro's comments at an energy forum in Moscow followed comments in August by U.S. President Donald Trump that he was not ruling out

“I am sure, even if we do not ask, we will be given even more support to boost Venezuela's defense capacity and sovereignty.”

— Nicolás Maduro

a “military option” in Venezuela. Maduro and other Venezuelan officials have long accused the United States of planning coup attempts and invasions in Venezuela, and until Trump made the comments in August, U.S. officials had always denied any military intentions in the South American country. “I am sure, even if we do not ask, we will be given even more support to boost Venezuela's defense capacity and sovereignty,” Maduro said Wednesday. Maduro met with Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier on Wednesday and said threats from the United States must be taken seriously. Maduro added that Venezuela's cooperation with Russia had made his country's military “three times stronger over the past 15 years.” Maduro added, “Putin is the leader of the emerging world, the world we want to live in. Putin carries the banner of decorum, dignity and peace.” Maduro also accused the United States of trying to bully Venezuela and the world, adding Venezuela has no nuclear arms, weapons of mass destruction or military bases in other countries. U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.),

one of Maduro's most outspoken critics in the United States, dismissed Maduro's comments about the United States threatening Venezuela. “The only threat to Venezuela is the Maduro regime itself,” said Rubio. “And the only ones invading are the Castro agents who control it.” [Editor's note: See [Q&A](#) on how international actors should respond to Venezuela's crisis in the Aug. 18 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Argentina's Gov't Faces Growing Trade Deficit

Argentina is facing a growing trade deficit amid high costs and a strong peso, which has led to pressure on the government to lower taxes or allow the country's currency to fall, Reuters reported Tuesday, citing analysts and businesses. “Today, Argentina is 20 percent more expensive than Europe, 15 percent more expensive than the United States and 5 percent more expensive than Brazil,” Martin Guaita, chief executive of bottler Envasados del Plata, told the wire service. Argentina has posted a \$4.5 billion trade deficit this year, after recording a trade surplus of \$2.4 billion last year as a recession crimped demand for imports. The country's budget assumes a wider trade deficit next year, with a 6.8 percent increase in imports and a 5.6 percent rise in exports, Reuters reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Mexico's Pemex Secures Partnerships for Onshore Fields

Mexican state oil company Pemex on Wednesday secured partnerships to help increase its oil production at mature onshore oil fields in southern Mexico, The Wall Street Journal

NEWS BRIEFS

Mexican Authorities End Search for Quake Victims

Authorities on Wednesday ended their search for victims of last month's powerful earthquake in central Mexico, which killed hundreds of people, Reuters reported. Rescue workers on Wednesday pulled the body of the last person known to be missing from the rubble of a collapsed office building in Mexico City. In all, 369 people were killed in the Sept. 19 earthquake. Ninety-eight others were killed in a Sept. 7 quake off the coast of Chiapas.

Brazilian Olympic Committee Head Accused of Bribing IOC Officials

Brazilian police on Thursday arrested the head of the country's Olympics committee, Carlos Arthur Nuzman, on allegations of conspiring to bribe members of the International Olympic Committee to pick Rio de Janeiro as the host for the 2016 Olympic Games, Reuters reported. Brazilian investigators say Nuzman helped arrange a \$2 million bribe in exchange for the committee selecting Rio. A former director of Brazil's national Olympics committee, Leonardo Gryner, was also arrested in a new phase of the investigation into corruption surrounding last year's Olympic Games, the police said. Nuzman's lawyer has said his client is innocent.

Brazil's Meirelles Reportedly Hires Social Media Experts

Brazilian Finance Minister Henrique Meirelles has hired social media experts to help boost his image online ahead of next year's presidential election, Reuters reported Wednesday, citing sources familiar with the matter. The move is the one of the strongest signs that Meirelles is considering running for president. He hired analysts linked with the Getúlio Vargas Foundation to help analyze his social media presence and build a communication plan.

reported. On the same day, an auction to form partnerships with private companies under production-sharing contracts for two offshore oil fields received no bids. Egyptian oil company Cheiron Holdings won a contract to co-develop with Pemex the Cárdenas and



González Anaya // File Photo: Mexican Government.

Mora fields in the southern Tabasco State. German oil company DEA Deutsche Erdoel won the tender for the Ogarrio field, also in Tabasco State. Both offered maximum royalties to the Mexican government as well as additional cash payments in exchange for owning 50 percent stakes in the projects. "At the end of the day, the result is favorable for Pemex, which will receive cash payments for more than \$500 million," said Pemex CEO José Antonio González Anaya. The Mexican state-owned company's oil output has steadily declined since 2004, and it is expected to produce an average of 1.94 million barrels per day this year. Lower output, combined with the global drop in oil prices, has put pressure on Pemex's budget. The company sees the farmouts as a means of sharing both the investment burden and the risks, while harnessing partners' technological capabilities.

Norway's Statoil Enters Brazil Solar Market

Norwegian energy company Statoil on Wednesday announced it had signed an agreement to acquire 40 percent in the "construction-ready" 162-megawatt Apodi solar asset in Brazil, marking the company's entrance into the solar market, CNBC reported. Statoil will be acquiring a share of Scatec Solar, an independent solar company based in Norway. The

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vector-borne diseases (such as Dengue, Mayaro and Yellow Fever). The threat to Puerto Rico's health is daunting as it faces long-term recovery from Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Both hurricanes exposed the fragility of Puerto Rico's and other small islands' infrastructure, disaster recovery efforts and impact on their economies. Governmental, non-governmental organizations and private-sector recovery efforts must be coordinated to reduce overlap, duplication

“With a limited number of pharmacies opened, patients with chronic diseases are most at risk of complications...”

— Ricardo Izurieta & Ismael Hoare

and gaps. Pre-disaster (needs assessments) or post-disaster (impact assessment) planning should drive recovery efforts. This integrated, multidisciplinary approach reduces the likelihood of focusing solely on infrastructure without addressing community health needs. Caribbean countries should coordinate pre- and post-disaster planning and implementation through regional bodies such as CDEMA or WHO/PAHO. These regional bodies provide an opportunity for an integrated, health-centered approach to disaster recovery, for building resilient communities and for reducing vulnerable populations for future disasters.”

two companies had agreed on an "exclusive cooperation" for potential future solar projects in Brazil, according to Statoil. The facility's construction will begin this month, with the goal of producing electricity by the end of next year. The Apodi solar facility will be located in the northeastern Ceará State. The project is expected to provide electricity to some 160,000 households. "As part of Statoil's strategy to

A **Ciro Ugarte, director of the Department of Health Emergencies at the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO):** "In the Caribbean and throughout the Americas, PAHO has supported the design of a plan to continue strengthening disaster risk reduction in order to prevent deaths, diseases, disabilities and the psychosocial impact of emergencies and disasters. The reason: the Americas rank second as the region most affected by disasters, after Asia. About 20.6 percent of the world's disasters between 2007 and 2016 occurred in this area, leading to 255,033 deaths, 898,816 injured and damages amounting to over \$470,000 million. The most common events were water- or climate-related, causing 5.6 percent of deaths and more than 73 percent of economic losses during this period. Damages caused by earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, winds and high tides are estimated to equal to between 1.2 percent and 1.7 percent of world's gross domestic product every year. PAHO member states are working to reduce the effects of these events through four strategic lines of a plan of action for the health sector: 1) recognizing disaster risks; 2) strengthening governance of disaster risk management; 3) promoting safe and smart hospitals; and 4) strengthening the sector's capacity for emergency and disaster preparedness, response and recovery. The first strategic line involves the use of evidence-based technical and scientific information for decision making. The second strategic line involves the incorporation of disaster risk management within the health sector, with the necessary

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actively complement our oil and gas portfolio with profitable renewable energy sources, we have so far focused on offshore wind, where we have a unique competitive advantage building on over 40 years with oil and gas activities," said Irene Rummelhoff, the company's executive vice president for new energy solutions. "The Apodi asset is a sensible first step into the solar industry," she added.

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human and financial resources, and clearly defined decision-making structures, flows and/or mechanisms. The third line promotes the safe hospital initiative to ensure that the health service network can maintain its operating capacity during emergencies and disasters. The fourth line states that 'strengthening response capacity and early recovery from disasters in the health sector should be participatory, inclusive and effective,' with operations centers that enable adequate interaction between decision-making and actions, ongoing practical training of the emergency and disaster teams, and emergency medical teams that meet basic quality standards."

A Lidia Fromm Cea, executive director of the Mesoamerica Project for Integration and Development: "A natural disaster may trigger a serious health crisis in its aftermath. There are important health risks that a country must face after a hurricane strikes it. Mangled debris and pools of household wastes accumulate in standing flood waters, which may cause cholera, zika, chikungunya and other mosquito-borne diseases. Fresh food and clean drinking water are scarce, causing water-borne illnesses to rise. Power outages affect hospital equipment that is used to keep people alive. For example, insulin and other vital medications must be refrigerated, and dialysis and oxygen machines need power, as do medical and sterilization equipment. Resilient health care systems respond during and after natural disasters. That is why all medical facilities—public or private—must have plan-B options to ensure efficient services and prompt response in times of crisis. National and local governments must first have a clear coordination mechanism of their own, in order to be able to lead and coordinate

all the different stakeholders and actors involved in reconstruction and in delivering aid. It is key to ensure a division of labor mechanism between state and non-state actors, to allocate resources and supplies

“ A natural disaster may trigger a serious health crisis in its aftermath.”

— Lidia Fromm Cea

where needed, and thus avoid duplication of efforts. At the regional level, governments should work together to establish a humanitarian hub in the country that has the best conditions to help the other neighboring countries during a disaster. At the local level, recovery efforts should focus on covering basic necessities. It is key to restore power capacity so hospitals can function normally. Connectivity is also important to ensure communications. It is important to replace broken-down infrastructure, but only after citizens have been taken care of. Regarding long-term solutions, incentives and adequate policies must be enacted to guarantee timely access, high-quality care and innovation in services, as well as to avoid the exodus of health care professionals. Proper public and private health care spending must be ensured. Insurance and special funds for emergencies and natural disasters should be made available. Robust and well-tested information technologies may help public and private hospital operations during and after a disaster."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue, Copyright © 2017

Erik Brand

Publisher
ebrand@thedialogue.org

Gene Kuleta

Editor
gkuleta@thedialogue.org

Nicole Wasson

Reporter, Assistant Editor
nwasson@thedialogue.org



Michael Shifter, President

Genaro Arriagada, Nonresident Senior Fellow

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Latin America Advisor is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005

www.thedialogue.org

ISSN 2163-7962

Subscription inquiries are welcomed at freetrial@thedialogue.org

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