



Municipalities affected by the flooding (circled in blue) span the central and western parts of Puerto Rico. International Medical Corps is collaborating with community health centers (shown as orange pins), government agencies and local first responders to support response and recovery efforts. Map courtesy of Asociación de Salud Primaria de Puerto Rico.

On May 10, following heavy rains, flooding and landslides that turned streets into flowing rivers and trapped residents on the roofs of their homes as they waited for rescue, Puerto Rico’s governor declared a state of emergency in 22 of the island’s 78 municipalities.¹

A large swath of the island—mostly rural communities in the north, west and central mountainous regions—has been impacted by the inundation of rain. More than 10 inches of rain were reported over two days, including near Ponce in the south, a region still recovering from the 2020 earthquakes.² In the communities most impacted by the mudslides, family homes and businesses alike were damaged due to the volume of water and force of landslides caused by the loosened earth. In one community alone in the rural far west of the island, 113 houses and 30 businesses were reported to be heavily damaged.

Though many communities still have access to electricity, clean drinking water is rapidly becoming a major challenge, with water-supply plants reporting damage and cutting off water to these rural communities. The Aqueduct and Sewer Authority notified communities that, due to high turbidity in the water, it will shut down and clean several water-supply plants serving multiple towns before water flow can resume.

The lack of potable water is raising concerns of potential outbreaks of disease due to unclean drinking water. Healthcare centers will need to be prepared for this if it occurs. In addition, standing water caused by the floods presents an optimal breeding ground for mosquitos, which could exacerbate the current surge in dengue cases in Puerto Rico, which was declared a public health emergency in March.³

Flooding and heavy rains also have decimated the island’s crops and killed livestock.⁴ With more than 80% of Puerto Rico’s food already imported, significant damage to locally grown crops could exacerbate rates of malnutrition and food insecurity, which already are significantly higher than those on the mainland.⁵ The loss of crops and animal life due to the flooding may create or increase food insecurity for those living there. Many community leaders are expressing concern, as access to these rural communities has been affected by mudslides.

With hurricane season less than a month away, and predications that it could be the “most active on record,” rapid response and recovery efforts are critical to restoring health and health-related services on the island.⁶

FAST FACTS

- On May 10, regions of Puerto Rico were inundated by heavy rain totaling as much as 10 inches in some areas, causing destructive flooding and landslides.
- In response to the flooding, the territory’s governor declared a state of emergency in 22 of the island’s 78 municipalities.
- Several water-supply plants have been closed due to high turbidity in the water, raising concerns of disease outbreaks due lack of potable water and standing water.
- Standing water from the floods can serve as mosquito breeding grounds, which may exacerbate the current surge in dengue cases on the island.

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/puerto-rico-rains-flooding-ab489797310e46864c2a894c1d523485>

² <https://apnews.com/article/puerto-rico-rains-flooding-ab489797310e46864c2a894c1d523485>

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/28/health/dengue-fever-puerto-rico-emergency/index.html>

⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/puerto-rico-declares-state-emergency-persistent-rains-unleash-110071764>

⁵ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/food-sovereignty-puerto-rico_n_64d907cae4b01e7cf027194a

⁶ <https://www.foxweather.com/weather-news/hurricane-researchers-release-stunning-prediction-for-2024-season>

International Medical Corps Response

International Medical Corps is responding to the flooding, deploying an assessment team to identify urgent needs for supplies and services both in the immediate aftermath and in the early recovery phase. We are coordinating with the Puerto Rico Department of Health, community health clinics and local organizations to identify and meet the most urgent needs in the aftermath of the rains, and will be engaging with local government and non-governmental partners located in affected municipalities in the southwest region of the island this week.

International Medical Corps has prepositioned emergency supplies and will be working with partners to distribute items that may support health centers in their immediate clean up, hygiene promotion and access to clean water, outreach efforts in communities they serve, and replacement of damaged medical supplies. We also are working to help healthcare workers who have been personally affected by the flooding to be able to get back to work quickly.



International Medical Corps has supported the health system of Puerto Rico in a variety of ways, including—as shown above—providing surge support during periods of high demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

International Medical Corps is identifying communities and partners that we can support immediately with \$50 food vouchers that can be used in local grocery stores accessible in the impacted regions, helping to provide access to essential food items for households that were already facing significant food insecurities prior to the floods.

The team will be working in close coordination with other members of the Puerto Rico Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (PR VOAD) and the local Department of Health offices to complement other response efforts, and may supply them with items to enhance their ongoing response actions in affected communities.

International Medical Corps in Puerto Rico

International Medical Corps has been an emergency responder in the United States since 2005, when we partnered with local community clinics overwhelmed by Hurricane Katrina. In the US, International Medical Corps is working more closely than ever before—for example, working with national, state and local partners in the healthcare system to address the significant challenges that faced domestic healthcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and deploying emergency response teams in response to natural disasters that have struck in recent years.

International Medical Corps has collaborated with partners to deliver health services in Puerto Rico since Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated the island in 2017. In recent years, we have responded to a number of emergencies on the island, including the 2020 earthquakes, the spread of COVID-19 and Hurricane Fiona, all while supporting efforts by local healthcare actors and nonprofit organizations to strengthen their capacity for emergency preparedness and response.

Today, we are focused on improving access to healthcare services, helping communities recover while building local resilience and contributing to the development of the local healthcare workforce so that community health centers are better equipped and able to meet local needs. Our priorities remain centered on community-based initiatives that support health centers, as well as the health of the individuals and families they serve who are most at risk for food insecurity, chronic illnesses and the impacts of disasters. By supporting frontline organizations as well as their communities, International Medical Corps is able to incorporate strategies that improve access to nutritious foods, improve emotional and physical well-being, and strengthen household- and organizational-level preparedness for future emergencies.