

International Medical Corps Deploys Emergency Response Team to Haiti

International Medical Corps' Emergency Response Team is in Haiti assisting survivors of the 7.0-magnitude earthquake that struck just 10 miles south of the capital, Port-au-Prince, yesterday. The International Medical Corps team is made up of many relief experts, including an emergency response team leader, medical officer, logistics officer, and emergency physicians.

“International Medical Corps is prepared to respond to all levels of medical assistance depending on what the most pressing needs are,” says Dina Prior, the Team Leader for the response. “Emergency health care will be our primary focus, both in the form of hands-on care and medical supplies and drugs.”

In addition to emergency medical care, survivors of the earthquake are likely to be in immediate need of non-food items like blankets, tents, stoves, and water purification equipment. Public health is a major concern as well. The International Medical Corps Emergency Response Team also plans to focus on providing emergency shelter and other essential items in its relief effort.

“We have a larger Emergency Response Team on standby ready to be deployed depending on the level of need,” says Prior. “When we arrive in Haiti, we will conduct a rapid needs assessment to determine what the greatest needs are and if we need additional assistance and expertise on the ground.”

An estimated 2.5 to 3 million people are expected to be affected by the earthquake. Blocked roads and power outages in the greater Port-au-Prince area have hindered needs assessments, but injuries and loss of life are expected to be substantial given the area's high population density. People are reportedly trapped under the rubble and Port-au-Prince is largely destroyed. Aftershocks reached as high as 5.9, triggering additional destruction and mudslides.

Already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti has been hit by a series of disasters recently and was battered by hurricanes in 2008. An estimated 70 percent of its population lives on less than two dollars a day. International Medical Corps' Emergency Response draws on 25 years of experience in emergency settings, including last September's earthquake in Sumatra, Indonesia, and the massive 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.

Since its inception nearly 25 years ago, International Medical Corps' mission has been consistent: relieve the suffering of those impacted by war, natural disaster and disease, by delivering vital health care services that focus on training. This approach of helping people help themselves is critical to returning devastated populations to self-reliance.