

CARE concerned about cholera outbreak in Papua New Guinea

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In what may be the first recorded occurrence of cholera in PNG, outbreaks have been confirmed in remote Wasu and Lae City in Morobe Province. The disease has already claimed 20 lives – although major newspapers in PNG report many more deaths. The situation is made worse by poor sanitation and lack of access to potable water supplies in rural Wasu and by lack of safe water supplies, crowding and insanitary conditions in the settlements around Lae City. Because Lae lies at the start of the Highlands Highway, it is feared that unless contained the epidemic will quickly spread up into the populous Highlands Provinces.

Simultaneous outbreaks of seasonal influenza and dysentery have killed a further 20 people around Menyamya District elsewhere in Morobe Province. More deaths from this double epidemic are reported from the neighbouring Eastern Highlands Province, and food shortages are reported from nearby remote areas of Gulf Province. In these rural areas where vehicular roads are absent, poor access to health centres and limited personnel and medical supplies are a particular concern.

To rapidly evaluate the situation, CARE International in PNG in partnership with the Provincial Division of Health has deployed an assessment team to the affected Wonenara Sub-district in the Eastern Highlands Province. With an already established presence in the country, CARE implements programs in community development, water and sanitation, HIV prevention, adult literacy, agriculture and natural resource management. As a result of this work, CARE has established networks in the region and the rapid assessment will help to assess the impacts of the disease outbreaks and CARE's role in this emergency.