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Cholera Update, July 18 - Aug. 10

by Barbara Khol

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July 18: Peruvian Health Minister Victor Yamamoto told reporters that since late January the cholera death toll in Peru totaled 2,288, and confirmed cases of the disease, 231,655. Hospitalized cholera victims came to 89,736, and the mortality rate is calculated at 0.99% nationwide. In Lima and its neighboring port city, Callao, cholera deaths numbered 227, and confirmed cases 80,502. The highest department death toll, 453, has been recorded for Loreto, located in the Amazon region, and bordering on Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador. Next in the ranking are the northern department of Cajamarca, which borders on Ecuador, at 376; La Libertad, 281; and Ucayli, bordering on Brazil, at 199. Departments registering the lowest cholera death tolls are Apurimac, at zero; Huancavelica and Madre de Dios at one each; Puno, four; Tacna, on the Chilean border, six; Cusco, seven; and, Tumbes, bordering on Ecuador, seven. Julio Burbano, Pan-American Health Organization representative in Peru, said the disease may become cyclical unless Peru's water treatment and sewage facilities are upgraded, and water pollution reduced. According to PAHO, Peru requires \$3 billion in investment over the next decade for installation of water treatment systems. July 29: In Quito, Ecuadoran deputy health minister Enrique Granizo told representatives of international aid organizations that since the first case of cholera was confirmed in February, the death toll has reached 500, and 31,000 confirmed or probable cases have been reported. Granizo said statistics indicate that the incidence of the disease is declining, although the mortality rate, at 1.5%, remains high, above all in rural communities. July 30: In Bogota (Colombia), the State Health Institute (IES) reported four new fatalities resulting from cholera in Choco department, which borders on Panama. Victor Klinger, Choco health secretariat technical coordinator, said an estimated 310 residents of seven municipalities in the area are infected, and "no controls exist." Official statistics indicate a national death toll of 79 over the past four months, and about 7 million confirmed cases of the disease. Aug. 1: In Peru, officials reported a total of 236,449 confirmed cases since late January, 91,467 required hospitalization. The death toll is 2,345. Guatemalan Health Minister Miguel Angel Montepeque told reporters that eight cases of cholera had been confirmed, one in Retalhuleu department, and seven in Coatepeque, San Marcos department. In addition, 67 persons were under observation at the Coatepeque hospital. Next, the minister confirmed that the Rio Suchiate, which serves as border between Guatemala and Mexico and is used for irrigation, was contaminated with cholera. Aug. 2: The UN High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) and the Mexican Refugee Assistance Committee (COMAR) implemented precautions to avoid the spread of cholera among Guatemalan refugees in the Mexican states of Chiapas, Campeche and Quintana Roo. According to the UNHCR, 23,000 Guatemalan refugees live in 128 camps in Chiapas, and 19,000 in camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo. [In Chiapas, health authorities reported the deaths of 12 cholera victims in Ciudad Hidalgo, near the Guatemalan border.] During a trip to the border area, Guatemalan Health Minister Montepeque told reporters that cases of cholera had been confirmed in San Marcos and Retalhuleu departments, and the coastal region of Quezaltenango department. The Guatemalan Congress recommended chlorination of drinking water, and prohibiting the sale of seafood and raw vegetables. In El Paso, Texas (US), at a cholera prevention conference convened by the Pan American Health Organization, federal Centers for Disease Control spokespersons said over 250,000 cases of cholera have been reported in seven nations in the Americas since the beginning

of the summer, including 14 cases in the US. According to the UN World Health Organization, since late January, the reported death toll in Latin America is 2,618. Dr. Roberto Tapia, the Mexican government's chief epidemiologist, said 253 cases of the disease had been confirmed in Mexico since June 13. As of July 30, he said, the death toll was two. Brazilian officials have confirmed 25 reported cholera cases since April, most of them in three cities bordering Peru and Colombia. In Costa Rica, two indigenous people have died and 30 more were suffering from what officials feared was a cholera outbreak in an isolated mountainous area in the southeastern part of the country. Costa Rican health officials were dispatched to the area to transport some of the ill to medical facilities where tests could be run to determine if cholera had hit the indigenous Chirripo mountain community. Aug. 4: Panamanian public health authorities confiscated a large supply of seafood and other foodstuffs from a Russian vessel at the Cristobal port in Colon. Health Minister Guillermo Rolla told journalists that the boat had sailed from Nicaragua without undergoing a sanitation inspection. In statements to reporters, Guatemalan deputy health minister Renato Palma suggested that cholera was introduced into Mexico from Peru via drug trafficking. He said the disease had skipped Central America and was first detected not in Mexican ports, but in the nation's interior. Three specialists in tropical diseases from the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) arrived in Guatemala to work on decontamination of the Rio Suchiate. Aug. 5: Guatemalan Health Minister Montepeque told Notimex that while over 150,000 Guatemalans could be affected with cholera, hospital facilities were capable of providing care to only 60,000. Aug. 6: The Costa Rican government suspended import of Guatemalan vegetables. Guatemalan Health Minister Montepeque said that a team of PAHO consultants had arrived and would work on cholera prevention in the Mexico-Guatemala border region. He said 15 cases had been confirmed and that 121 persons were under observation in the Coatepeque hospital. In Geneva, WHO released a report on the spread of cholera in Latin America. As of July 31, 271,695 cases had been confirmed, and 2,956 persons had died of the disease. Aug. 7: Guatemalan deputy health minister Renato Palma Ramos told reporters Guatemalan and Mexican health officials had formed a joint commission to fight the spread of cholera in the border region. He said that among the commission's first tasks would be a project to decontaminate the Rio Suchiate. Palma Ramos said the Guatemalan government had appropriated \$25 million to combat cholera, \$12 million of which had already been spent. Guatemalan Health Minister Montepeque said 25 persons had been diagnosed with cholera in the border region. [In Mexico, 327 cases of cholera have been confirmed.] Aug. 8: Costa Rican deputy health minister Manuel Cortes told reporters that a resident of Rio Coco de Burica, located near the Panamanian border, had died of cholera-like symptoms. He said an autopsy was being carried out to confirm the cause of death. Guatemalan Health Minister Montepeque said the number of confirmed cases of the disease had increased to 41. Guatemalan officials asserted that the Costa Rican decision to suspend imports constituted a "lack of solidarity among brothers." Aug. 9: Health officials in Brazil's state of Amazonia reported eight new cases of cholera in Tabatinga and Benjamin Constant, located in the central and eastern areas of the region, respectively. As of Friday, a total of 40 cases had been confirmed in Brazil: 37 in Amazonia, two in Mato Grosso state, and one in the city of Sao Paulo. No fatalities have been reported. Aug. 10: The Mexican Health Secretariat reported a death toll of five. As of Aug. 9, 402 cases of cholera had been confirmed. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 08/01/91, 08/02/91, 08/04/91, 08/06-08/91; EFE, 07/29/91, 08/01/91, 08/02/91; AFP, 08/02/91, 08/04/91, 08/06/91; Notimex, 07/18/91, 07/30/81, 08/05/91, 08/07/91, 08/10/91; Inter Press Service, 08/09/91)

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