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DISEASE

In Haiti, typhoid fever cases suspected

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GONAIVES, Haiti - American doctors working in this flood-ravaged city said Sunday that they have found a suspected case of typhoid fever, and the local Red Cross acknowledged that there have been "several" others.

The man suspected of having typhoid fever, a highly contagious and life-threatening water-borne disease, was taken by his family to a clinic staffed by five doctors and four nurses of the Miami chapter of the Haitian Physicians Association. The team arrived in Port-au-Prince on Saturday and traveled to Gonaives, where they began seeing patients Sunday morning.

"We have the one case of typhoid," said Dr. Yves Jodesty, who practices internal medicine at Broward General Medical Center. "Are there more? Most likely. I'm just waiting to see."

Aid agencies have feared epidemic diseases in Gonaives since floods washed through this city of 250,000 on Sept. 18. The waters did not recede for ten days, leaving the residents to wade through water that was waist-high in some areas. More than 1,800 were killed in the floods, and bodies floated in the water for days. Floods washed out the main roads into town, hampering relief efforts and delaying the arrival of drinking water supplies.

Haitian Red Cross president Dr. Michaele Amedee-Gedeon said several other cases of suspected typhoid have turned up in Gonaives in the past few days.

"There were a few cases last week," she said. "We don't want to panic people. We have not confirmed this with laboratory tests yet. We don't have the tests here. But yes, we do seem to have typhoid here now."

She said the patient at the Hospital Independence, where the Haitian-American delegation had set up, was to be transferred to the city of St. Marc, three hours away, because tests were available there. But as the patient suffered high fevers and diarrhea for 15 days, the doctors were fairly certain.

Before the delegation from Florida arrived, Haitian doctors and nurses were staffing the clinic, which doesn't have running water or electricity, Amedee-Gedeon said.

"Haitians have been working here since the very first hour," she said. "I think the world should know that it is not just the international community working here. Haitians are working, too." >

Jodesty, president of the Miami chapter of the Haitian Physicians Association, said his organization arrived with donations of medicine and equipment from North Shore Hospital and Holy Cross Hospital. The team plans to stay in Gonaives one week and then be replaced by a fresh team.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is working to set up a temporary hospital to replace the main Gonaives hospital, damaged by the mud that rushed through the city.

U.N. peacekeepers sent Argentine, Uruguayan and Brazilian army medics into Gonaives shortly after the floods, staffing a clinic that delivered 48 babies before closing down Saturday.