

Be vigilant against cholera - PM

As the country continues to strengthen measures to prevent the transmission of cholera into Jamaica, Prime Minister, the Hon. Bruce Golding, is again appealing to Jamaicans to do their part in ensuring that the country remains cholera-free.

"I'm urging Jamaicans to be extra vigilant at this time, and particularly the children, because you know that they play in anything," Prime Minister Golding said during his monthly call in programme 'Jamaica House Live' on Wednesday (November 24). He said that the most effective means of preventing cholera is by practising good personal hygiene, such as proper washing of hands, especially after using the toilet; cooking food properly; ensuring the consumption of safe drinking water by boiling, or applying a few drops of bleach to water used for domestic purposes. He said that Jamaica has to be particularly cautious because of the country's close proximity to Haiti, where some 1,400 persons have so far died from cholera. More than 60,000 persons have been infected and about 25,000 have been hospitalised.

"We are close to Haiti, there is fair amount of movement of people between Haiti and Jamaica and we have to be very careful about the transmission (of cholera) into Jamaica. We are taking all the precautions that we can," Mr. Golding said, while expressing empathy for the people of the French-speaking island. Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. It is most likely to be found and spread in places with inadequate water treatment, poor sanitation, and inadequate hygiene. A person can contract cholera by consuming food or water tainted with this bacterium. Infection is often mild or without symptoms, but approximately one in 20 infected persons will have severe symptoms such as profuse watery diarrhea, vomiting, and leg cramps. In such cases, rapid loss of body fluids can lead to dehydration and shock, and without treatment, death can occur within hours. The Prime Minister advised persons to seek medical treatment immediately, once these symptoms are exhibited. Up to 80 per cent of cholera cases can be successfully treated with oral rehydration salts. "If you come under any of those symptoms, get to a hospital, get to a clinic, get to a doctor immediately, because there are fluids that can be given to...put you back up safely," he said, urging parents and guardians to keep "an eye on the children," in particular, for signs of the illness. In a statement to Parliament on cholera prevention, response and management on Tuesday (Oct. 26), Mr. Golding informed that the Government had activated its National Emergency Response mechanism with the Ministry of Health as the lead agency.

Provision of safe water and sanitation is critical in reducing the impact of cholera and other waterborne diseases. An estimated three to five million cases of cholera and over 100,000 deaths occur each year around the world. There are currently no reported cases of the disease in Jamaica, which has been free of cholera since 1852.