

# Public Health in Emergencies (PHE) FACT SHEET

## Health Consequences of TSUNAMI

### Immediate health concerns

- After the rescue of survivors, the primary public health concerns are clean drinking water, food, shelter, and medical care for injuries.
- Flood waters can pose health risks such as contaminated water and food supplies.
- Loss of shelter leaves people vulnerable to insect exposure, heat, and other environmental hazards.
- The majority of deaths associated with tsunamis are related to drowning, but traumatic injuries are also a primary concern. Injuries such as broken limbs and head injuries are caused by the physical impact of people being washed into debris such as houses, trees, and other stationary items. As the water recedes, the strong suction of debris being pulled into large populated areas can further cause injuries and undermine buildings and services.
- Medical care is critical in areas where little medical care exists.

### Secondary effects

- Natural disasters do not necessarily cause an increase in infectious disease outbreaks. However, contaminated water and food supplies as well as the lack of shelter and medical care may have a secondary effect of worsening illnesses that already exist in the affected region.
  - Decaying bodies create very little risk of major disease outbreaks.
  - The people most at risk are those who handle the bodies or prepare them for burial.

### Long-lasting effects

The effects of a disaster last a long time. The greater need for financial and material assistance is in the months after a disaster, including

- Surveying and monitoring for infectious and water- or insect-transmitted diseases;
- Diverting medical supplies from non affected areas to meet the needs of the affected regions;
- Restoring normal primary health services, water systems, housing, and employment; and
- Assisting the community to recover mentally and socially when the crisis has subsided.
  - Proper identification of human remains will contribute to the resolution of the grieving process
  - Burial method of human remains should be based on religious and cultural norms
  - All efforts should be taken to search for the reported missing persons
  - Establish support systems (friend, relatives, relief workers) to facilitate psychosocial recovery process of survivors
- Observing good sanitary practices and preventing overcrowding in emergency shelters should be observed to avoid outbreak of communicable diseases