



**OECS Secretariat, Castries, St. Lucia, Tuesday November 9<sup>th</sup> 2010.** The Castries based OECS Secretariat is collaborating with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), to help reduce the strain on the region's health sector caused by the deadly impact of Hurricane Tomas.

On October 31st 2010, Hurricane Tomas a category 2 phenomenon unleashed extensive devastation to the agriculture, tourism, health and other sectors on the OECS Member countries of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia.

Of the two affected OECS Member States, Saint Lucia was hardest hit with at least 8 deaths recorded in association with the hurricane.

In an effort to address the hurricane affected health sectors of , St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia, Francis Burnet, Head of the OECS Secretariat's Pharmaceutical Procurement Service OECS PPS says his institution and PAHO are in the preliminary stages of determining the pressing medical needs of those OECS Member States:

***"Particularly for Saint Lucia, the electricity was compromised and many health centres might have lost refrigerated medicines, for example insulin and biological products such as vaccines. Those preparations would need to be replaced. So in the case of Saint Lucia the Chief Pharmacist has been conducting initial assessments and the OECS Secretariat will collaborate with the Chief Pharmacist and managers of central medical stores in those two countries with respect to replacing health centre products. The priority countries at this point will be Saint Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines. It seems as though the damage in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is less severe. However we are mindful that we are still in the hurricane season, and we will keep our surveillance programme open."***



Burnet adds that after the assessment, the OECS Secretariat and PAHO will look at the most effective method of procuring and shipping the needed medicines directly to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia. He says insulin, vaccines and oral rehydration salts are among the priority items: ***“Patients without refrigerators sometimes keep their personal supply of medicines at nearby health centres and those medicines might be in short supply. Therefore a rapid assessment is needed to ensure a continuity of those biological products. Usually in the aftermath of a hurricane, persons might consume water, which if not well preserved will cause water-borne diseases such as diarrhea and other gastro intestinal complications. So oral rehydration salts will be a priority item. Therefore we are collecting the data to provide those medicines as expeditiously as possible.”***

The OECS Secretariat's Pharmaceutical Procurement Service has been working closely with Dr. Adriana Ivama, a medicines and biological sub regional advisor attached to the PAHO office in Barbados, in conducting the needs assessment of the two Hurricane affected OECS Members States. Burnett says it is an established procedure where the Pan American Health Organisation offers assistance to affected countries in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

## Contact

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