Drier conditions in Central America, the Caribbean and central parts of the Andean region are expected to persist until May 2016. 4.2 million people are currently affected by drought in Central America and 2.5 million require immediate food and nutrition assistance and may be victim of increased food and water-borne diseases. In the Caribbean, the impact of drought and possible health consequences including cholera in Haiti should be closely monitored. In South America, drier conditions contribute to conditions of increased acute respiratory infections. Water scarcity associated with poor sanitation, hygiene and food handling practices create conditions for increased incidence of diarrhoeal and skin diseases.

Above-average rainfall is expected in parts of South America until May 2016 particularly in Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina that could cause floods and increases in the incidence of vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, chikungunya, and zika; food intoxication; water-borne diarrhoeal diseases such as cholera, typhoid, salmonellosis; and acute respiratory infections in cold and humid areas. Health facilities could be damaged and restrict affected people’s access to health services.

The Pacific cyclone season (November to May 2016) is anticipated to be more active than normal, while the Atlantic cyclone season (June to October 2016) is expected to be less active than normal.

The 1997-1998 El Niño event affected an estimated of 27 million people and caused more than USD 18 billion damage in Latin America and the Caribbean. Peru and Ecuador experienced rainfall more than 10 times the usual levels, with consequential flooding and extensive landslides that resulted in widespread destruction of health infrastructure. In Peru 557 health centres and 91 in Ecuador were damaged. In Ecuador El Niño affected 7 million people (60% of the population) and malaria outbreaks increased 440%.
WHO PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE ACTIONS IN THE AMERICAS

Summary of preparedness actions taken:

- PAHO has conducted regular tele-, video- and web-conferences with Ministries of Health and Country Offices, with the participation of the Centre for the Study of the El Niño phenomenon (CIIIFEN) in Ecuador.
- PAHO’s Directing Council has approved a decision urging the countries to speed up mitigation and preparedness for El Niño and requesting the PAHO Secretariat to continue and strengthen its support to Member States.
- PAHO facilitated the development of the “WHO Action Plan to address adverse effects of the El Niño phenomenon” with the following priorities:
  - Preparedness: build country and WHO response capacities to address El Niño related disasters;
  - Rapid response and recovery: support efficient response in priority countries to reduce morbidity and mortality as a consequence of El Niño and provide access to health services;
  - Information management: establish a mechanism to assess the socioeconomic impact in the health sector and develop lessons learnt of the El Niño in the Americas, to share experiences between countries.