

American Leprosy Missions Targets Flesh-Eating Disease

A disease most people have never heard of has devastated areas in the West African nation of Ghana. Buruli ulcer is an infectious disease that can lead to both physical and emotional scarring.

But a new campaign offers hope for the people of Ghana affected by Buruli ulcer – both for patients and their families. American Leprosy Missions is leading the charge with a three-year, \$2 million commitment to fund *End Buruli Now* to help eradicate the disease.

The organization is also sending 9,000 pounds of general medical supplies to the region to help those who are waiting for care and medical treatment of the disease. Subsequent phases of the campaign will extend beyond Ghana to include neighboring West African countries.

The Buruli ulcer bacteria can lead to skin ulceration, extreme swelling in the limbs, and scarring that often results in deformity if left untreated. In addition to its physical toll, the disease often results in the social ostracizing of those affected by it. One-fifth of the world's cases of the disease are in Ghana. Cruelly, Buruli ulcer disproportionately affects children under the age of 15, who make up 50 percent of its victims.

American Leprosy Missions' work in Buruli ulcer led to the discovery that half of the World Health Organization's needed supply of antibiotics—the vast majority of which are sent to West and Central Africa—is not being met. The Ministry of Health in Ghana also requested additional medical supplies because many hospitals and clinics do not have enough supplies to treat those affected.

American Leprosy Missions' urgently needed shipment of medical supplies includes: bandages, gowns, masks, needles, syringes, gloves, waste disposal units and gauzes.

"Buruli ulcer is a cruel disease that brings with it both physical disfigurement and social stigma," said Bill Simmons, CEO of American Leprosy Missions. "We're honored to be able to bring hope and relief to people dealing with this disease in Ghana and other African nations."

Because Buruli ulcer is related to leprosy, efforts around the former accrue benefits to the latter. American Leprosy Missions reports that early case detection and treatment of Buruli ulcer in Ghana is already having a positive impact on leprosy projects in the country.