

MAF Battling Deadly Epidemics in DRC

As cholera and measles sicken thousands in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mission Aviation Fellowship is providing desperately needed flight services to assist medical agencies in their efforts to combat these deadly diseases.

A measles epidemic has threatened the DRC for the past nine months. MAF, a faith-based relief organization that brings aid to needy people in remote areas of the world, has been flying medical workers and supplies into the areas most affected.

In the past month MAF has carried some 100 medical staff and 14,000 pounds of vaccines and medical supplies to support 24 mobile clinics that Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, MSF) has launched to fight measles.

"We have recently flown 13 flights to Malemba from Lubumbashi for MSF France, transporting doctors, nurses, logistics people, vaccines, medical supplies, generators, beds, food, water—you name it," says MAF Pilot Tim Chase. "We have also been flying for MSF Holland, as they assess the situation and prepare to respond. Our support of this crisis is ongoing."

Says Chase: "In one village, the residents wanted help so desperately that 300 people worked four days to clear and reopen an overgrown airstrip so MAF could land with the medical team and supplies."

According to UN reports, some 115,600 Congolese children suffered from measles between January and June, and 1,145 died of the disease. MAF has provided continuing support for treatment and vaccination campaigns.

While measles plagues south central DRC, cholera threatens the western part of the country. Ron Wismer, MAF program manager

in western DRC, reports the aviation ministry has been transporting medicines and personnel from Kinshasa into Bolobo and Mbandaka, towns located north of Kinshasa on the Congo River.

“We are now flying into Mbandaka two or three times per week to support the cholera work, and also flying regularly into Bolobo,” says Wismer. “The epidemic seems to be following the river.”

Cholera was first reported in western DRC in March. According to the World Health Organization, 3,896 cases have been reported, including 265 deaths.