

MEDICC's Light for Life Campaign Solar Energy for Cuban Maternity Homes

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1) What is a maternity home in Cuba?

These are municipal-level homes where expectant mothers at greatest risk are encouraged by their physicians to stay during the last weeks or months of pregnancy, either as live-in guests or day boarders. The homes are free of charge.

2) How do maternity home services protect high-risk expectant mothers?

The homes provide meals and round-the-clock attention from nursing staff, as well as regular physician visits. They also offer classes in self-care and caring for newborns, and importantly, a stress-free environment. This last is especially critical now that daily living—with rolling blackouts, transportation woes and shortages of basic goods—has become so difficult. In the case of overnight guests, partners and other children are welcome to visit, and partners are encouraged to join in parenting classes.

3) Who benefits from the maternity homes?

When a family physician or OB/GYN considers that either the expectant mother or her unborn child—or both—may be endangered, they often prescribe a stay at one of Cuba's over 100 maternity homes islandwide. Some conditions that prompt such a recommendation include: anemia, insufficient weight gain (a predictor of low birth weight), risk of premature birth, epilepsy, diabetes, high blood pressure, fetal growth retardation, low placental insertion, the prospect of multiple births, maternal age in the teens, women over 35 with another risk factor, geographic isolation and social risk (poor living conditions or lack of a sufficient support network at home).

4) What do power outages mean for everyday life in the maternity homes?

Blackouts plunge Cuba into darkness most of the night and shut down fans, refrigerators, TVs and other appliances most of the day. The maternity homes, embedded in communities throughout the country, fare no better. And this in turn threatens the staff's ability to provide quality care for these highly vulnerable women and their unborn children. They need to have the lights on to operate fans in the heat, refrigerate food and medicines, wash clothes, hold classes and charge telephones so expectant mothers can stay in touch with family members and nurses can stay in touch with other health care providers and emergency services.

5) How will solar panels help?

The panels will provide round-the-clock electricity for the equivalent of up to 30 light fixtures, five fans, two refrigerators, five TVs and one air conditioning unit. **We expect our grant to a Cuban small business will allow installation to begin right away in five maternity homes in working-class neighborhoods in Havana and surrounding areas...and eventually in 15.**

6) Why is solar a better alternative for Cuban maternity homes?

Solar is better by a long shot. It not only makes the homes independent of the national electricity grid and thus independent of fuel imports. But it is also better because solar panels generate electricity from a renewable energy source...one that doesn't run out and also is better for the environment than any fossil fuel. In addition, the small business installing these solar panels also provides repairs and maintenance. In short, **solar is a long-term investment for the maternity homes, for Cuba and for the future of our planet.**

7) How are U.S. sanctions impacting infant and maternal deaths in Cuba?

The sanctions mean fewer preventive treatments and therapies available, fewer medications in general, food shortages, rolling blackouts and the anxiety of not knowing when or if an ambulance will arrive in time. Until the pandemic, Cuba's infant mortality rates were steadily declining, reaching 4.0 per 1,000 live births in 2018. That put them on par with Europe and Japan, and well below U.S. rates.

In June of 2021, Washington partially lifted its sanctions for several other countries to help them confront the pandemic. But not for Cuba, which saw an uptick in infant mortality. The White House has now adopted a campaign it calls "maximum pressure" on Cuba—most recently ramped up to a full blockade on all fuel imports. This is crippling Cuba's once-robust universal public health system, while the island's economic crisis has turned into severe, daily hardship for most Cuban families. The result? In 2025, the country registered an infant mortality of 9.9 per 1,000 live births, over double that of 2018. Maternal mortality has suffered a similar fate, rising to 44.1 per 100,000 live births vs. 40.6 the year before.

8) Is my donation legal under U.S. law? And will it be tax deductible?

Yes, it is lawful as a contribution to this MEDICC medical and health-related humanitarian project that directly benefits the Cuban people.

Yes, your donation is tax deductible to the full extent permitted under U.S. law, since MEDICC is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization in the United States.

9) How will I know when and where the solar panels are up and running?

MEDICC is coordinating a team on the ground to monitor the process from start to finish. We'll be sending you photos and reports as the panels are installed and put to use in the homes.

10) What can I do to spread the word about Light for Life?

You can share the campaign with your friends, co-workers, organizations and institutions. You might also consider donating in honor of a family member's birthday or other important life event. If your organization, school or church would like to join us, please send a note to our Executive Director Teddie Potter at tpotter@mediccgloba.org