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**US sanctions bite into Cuban healthcare**

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US sanctions bite into Cuban healthcare – despite claims they only affect leadership US sanctions are making ordinary Cubans sick, literally. Despite Washington’s insistence that its sanctions hurt only the banks and government officials they target, the entire population is being deprived of lifesaving drugs.

Cuba, already under a US trade embargo since 1962, was hit with even stricter sanctions earlier this year in what the Trump administration calls an effort to pressure the country into dropping its support for the Venezuelan government of Nicolas Maduro. But the economic restrictions Washington claims are meant to punish Cuba’s government are actually intensifying the suffering of its people, who are denied crucial medicines because of the blockade.

Swiss NGO MediCuba, which provides HIV, cancer and pediatric care to Cubans, found itself unable to work last month after its bank, PostFinance, halted all transfers to Cuba because of US sanctions. It was one of the last banks that processed such transactions, and foreign groups trying to operate in Cuba are left to search for another route – private institutions that charge exorbitant fees, Western Union money transfers, or even asking travelers to bring cash into the country.

While Cuba has tens of thousands of skilled physicians, even the best doctor cannot work with no resources, and the US has done its best to ensure that Cubans have as few resources as possible. Medical devices like x-ray machines are as “vintage” as the 1950s cars that have become a visual icon for visitors and parts to repair them are extremely difficult to acquire. Cuba

imports 37 percent of its medicines and 85 percent of the ingredients it uses to produce medicines locally, and shortages of even common drugs like antihistamines, painkillers, contraceptives, and hypertension medications are frequent.

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