

## LASSA FEVER

Lassa fever is a viral infection caused by a single stranded RNA virus belonging to the arenaviridae family, with an incubation period of about 6-21 days. There have been reported cases in various African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Mali and Sierra Leone. It was named after the town, Lassa in Borno state where it was first discovered in Nigeria.

1 out of 5 infections causes severe illness where the virus affects some organs in the body such as the liver, spleen, kidneys etc. It is transmitted to humans through contact with household items or foods contaminated with rats and rodent's urine or faeces.



It can also be transmitted from person to person through exposure to infected person's blood, urine and other body secretions. Poor environmental sanitation and congested or over-populated environments can also be a factor in the spread of Lassa fever. It may also be transmitted sexually.

## SYMPTOMS

Generally, a person infected with Lassa fever starts to show symptoms like fever, weakness and other malaria-like symptoms.

However, after a few days other symptoms may follow, as listed below

- Sore throat
- Muscle pain
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Abdominal pain

In severe cases, these symptoms may occur

- Swelling on the face
- Fluid in the lung cavity
- Bleeding from the mouth, nose etc.
- Low blood pressure
- Seizures
- Disorientation
- Coma

As the symptoms of Lassa fever are varied and non-specific, it is often difficult to diagnose. It is also difficult to distinguish because it has similar symptoms with some viral haemorrhagic fevers like Ebola. Effective diagnosis requires a high index of suspicion and specific laboratory tests.

## PREVENTION

- To prevent the spread of Lassa fever, maintain proper environmental sanitation and personal hygiene. Proper sanitation includes storing food in rodent-proof containers, disposing waste far away from the house and maintaining proper kitchen hygiene.
- Do not use these rodents as a source of food e.g. bush meat.
- Avoid consuming/drinking raw garri (because it is not cooked) or other foodstuffs that are not properly stored away from rodents.
- Family members that are caring for infected person are advised to avoid contact with blood, urine and any other secretions from infected persons.
- Health worker should also avoid contact with blood, urine or body fluids of infected persons by wearing protective clothing and ensure proper waste disposal.
- Laboratory workers are also at risk, therefore samples taken from infected persons should be handled in a properly-equipped laboratory and under proper containment conditions



## TREATMENT

An antiviral drug called Ribavirin can be used to treat Lassa fever if it is given at the early stages of the illness. There is not enough research to support the use of ribavirin as a treatment; at the severe or secondary stage of this viral infection. There is currently no vaccine for the prevention of Lassa fever.