



National Public Health Institute Of Liberia

Preventing and Controlling Public Health Threats

Office of the Director General

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Press Release

Meningococcal Disease in Lofa County

MONROVIA, January 24, 2018: On January 13, 2018, the Lofa County Health Team (LCHT) notified the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL) and the Ministry of Health (MOH), of a cluster of unexplained health events including three deaths and one hospital admission from within one family in Kelimabendu town, Foya district, Lofa County. Cases presented with symptoms, including, headache, general body weakness, body pain, and among young children, uncontrollable crying.

The initial case was a 45 year-old male who became ill on December 23, 2017 and died on January 1, 2018. Four days after his death, his children started experiencing similar symptoms and two of them died. The other child received treatment at the Foya Boma isolation unit and was discharged on January 17, 2018.

On January 19, 2018, the LCHT notified the NPHIL/MOH, World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC), of a death of 12 year-old child who was a contact of the original source family. On the evening of January 22, 2018, the National Reference Laboratory **confirmed that the case was positive for the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*** serogroup W.

Neisseria meningitidis causes an infection of the brain or the blood. In Africa, we usually see the infection around the brain, which is called **meningitis**. The cases in Lofa County in northwestern Liberia are similar to what was seen in Sinoe County in the southeast in May 2017. **Meningococcal diseases typically include** meningococcal meningitis and meningococcal bloodstream infection (septicemia). A person can have one or both infections, as is the case with the current events in Lofa County.

The incubation period is between 2 to 10 days, with the peak being 2 to 4 days. This disease is treatable. Treatment must begin quickly to prevent death. **Common symptoms may include:** fever, fatigue, stiff neck, severe headaches, vomiting, cold hands and feet, chills, or pain in the muscles, joints, chest or abdomen (belly), rapid breathing, or diarrhea. In the later stages, a dark purple rash, which is called purpura, can appear. It is important to get treatment from a health center **IMMEDIATELY** if you have any of these symptoms.

The Lofa County Health Team is leading the response with support from NPHIL/MOH, WHO, US-CDC. LCHT has identified over 200 contacts who are receiving prophylactic treatment to

prevent and protect them from the disease. Healthcare workers are also receiving prophylaxis. Heightened surveillance activities are ongoing in the affected communities in Foya district and surrounding areas. Through this active surveillance, an additional four cases have been identified, hospitalized in the isolation unit, and are currently receiving treatment.

The National Public Health Institute of Liberia, Ministry of Health and partners, are encouraging the public to continue to take the following **preventive measures**:

- Report any deaths or sickness to the County Health Team and local authorities in any county, especially Lofa, Gbarpolu, Bong, Nimba and Montserrado Counties.
- People who are having signs and symptoms should report to the nearest health facility.
- Prayer houses and traditional healers should take appropriate precautions and notify local authorities if they encounter persons with these signs and symptoms.
- Reinforce hand washing practices.
- For those persons who die and are linked to the cluster of illness in Lofa, the LCHT burial team will work with the families to conduct safe and dignified burials.