MONROVIA, LIBERIA, 30th August 2019: The National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and partners are responding to Lassa fever outbreak in the country.

According to a release issued in Monrovia, on 22nd August 2019, Bong County Health Team notified NPHIL and MOH of a Lassa fever outbreak following the confirmation of one case from Suakoko District. The deceased, was a 30-year-old male and Laboratory technician, a health worker who worked for Phebe Hospital and a resident of Phebe Airstrip, Suakoko District. Our hearts are broken and we express our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

Similarly, on 24th and 25th August 2019, the National Public Health Reference Laboratory confirmed two additional cases of Lassa fever infection in a 46-year-old male and a 14-year-old female both residents of Suakoko Town, Suakoko District, Bong County.

So far, a total of 30 contacts including 18 health workers have been line-listed and being followed up. Two of the contacts have become symptomatic and one has been tested negative. Additionally, two cases (one contact) remain in isolation undergoing Ribavirin treatment. This is the tenth confirmed case being detected from Bong County since 2019.

In response to the outbreak, MOH, NPHIL, WHO, US-CDC and partners are providing technical, financial, and logistical support to the District Response Teams. No epidemiological link has been established between these cases. However, there is a likelihood for these cases to be linked based on history of the source of infection.

From 1st January to 25th August, 2019, a total of 92 suspected cases including 21 deaths have been reported. Of these, twenty-five (25) cases were confirmed by RT-PCR (Nimba-9, Bong-10, Grand Bassa-5 and Grand Kru -1) while 9 remain suspected cases.

The case fatality rate among confirmed cases is 36% (9/25). Males are mostly affected by the disease (56%) of confirmed cases as compared to female.
The release also disclosed that although Lassa fever is not new to Liberia, it is a deadly viral disease that requires urgent attention. The disease is spread by rodents or rats and through close contact with affected persons. We are concerned about the sporadic increase of Lassa Fever cases outside of the Lassa Belt in Liberia.

Health authorities are advising people to take the following public health measures:

- Keep your environment clean;
- Cover your dishes to prevent rats ‘pu-puing or pee-pee’ on them;
- Cover food in tightly-closed containers to prevent rats from playing in food or drinking water;
- Do not eat rats because you can get the sickness by coming in contact with their blood, ‘pee-pee or pu-pu’;
- Do not dry food in open places where rats can reach;
- Avoid body contact with affected persons and endemic zone; and
- Visit a health facility immediately when you feel sick.

Meanwhile, NPHIL, MOH and partners are appealing to the general public to take the necessary preventive measures and kindly report cases of fever to the nearest health facility. We continue to improve our rapid response teams at county, district and community levels through the County Emergency Operation Centers (EOCs) and to provide technical, financial and logistical support to the outbreaks.

Signed:  
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