PRESS RELEASE

Health Authorities Declare Continuous Lassa Fever Outbreak in Liberia

Monrovia, Liberia, January 9, 2020: Following the recent detection of several Lassa fever cases across four counties, the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health announces that Liberia has experienced a continuous Lassa fever outbreak.

The NPHIL National Reference Laboratory has recently confirmed two Lassa fever cases at the ELWA Hospital in Montserrado County. The first case was confirmed on December 30, while the second was confirmed on January 6, 2020. The first case was a 30-year old female who expired on December 28, 2019, while the second case is a medical doctor who was infected by a Lassa fever patient that expired at the CH Rennie Hospital. The doctor is recuperating well.

Also on December 30, 2019, a Lassa fever case was reported from District #3 A/B, Grand Bassa County. This case is a 20-year old female who is being treated at the LAC Hospital in Grand Bassa County along with two other Lassa fever Cases.

Meanwhile, Lofa County reported two confirmed cases of Lassa fever on December 19, 2019 and January 8, 2020 respectively. Both cases expired and received safe and dignified burials.

A confirmed Lassa fever case was reported from the CH Rennie Hospital in Margibi County on December 18, 2019. The case was a 30-year old female that had gone for treatment for septic abortion, but there was a suspicion of Lassa fever. A sample was collected and tested positive for Lassa fever. The patient died in the isolation unit, and safe and dignified burial was performed by the Margibi County Health Team.

According to a release issued in Monrovia, from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019, NPHIL, through the National Reference Laboratory, recorded 50 confirmed cases of Lassa fever. Of the 50 cases, 18 deaths were recorded, a Case Fatality Rate (CFR) of 36%. This 2019 CFR is a significant improvement compared to the 2018 CFR of 66%.

In view of the aforementioned recent Lassa fever cases, and the fact that NPHIL has responded to an average of one Lassa fever case per week in recent months, NPHIL, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, has deemed it expedient to announce that Liberia has had a continuous Lassa fever outbreak.
National Public Health Institute Of Liberia
Preventing and Controlling Public Health Threats

The release also disclosed that although Lassa fever is not new to Liberia, it is a potentially deadly viral disease that requires urgent attention. The disease is spread by rodents or rats and through close contact with affected persons. Lassa fever is not as infectious as Ebola and rarely spread from persons to persons. However, health workers, communities, and the general public should adhere to good hygiene practices and Infection Prevention and Control Practices (IPC) to prevent Lassa fever transmission. **We are concerned about the sporadic increase of Lassa fever cases outside 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-ing’ 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 Operations Centers (EOCs) and to provide technical, financial and logistical support for controlling disease outbreaks.

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