

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

LASSA FEVER

Lassa fever is an acute viral illness that occurs in West Africa. The illness was discovered in 1969 when two missionary nurses died in Nigeria. The cause of the illness was found to be Lassa virus, named after the town in Nigeria where the first cases originated. The disease is fairly common in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Nigeria. In some areas of Sierra Leone and Liberia, it is known that 10%-16% of people admitted to hospitals every year have Lassa fever.



Symptoms

Symptoms appear 7- 21 days after exposure and include:

- Most (80%) of infected people have mild or no symptoms
- Fever
- Chest pain
- Sore throat, cough
- Back pain, abdominal pain
- Vomiting, diarrhea
- Eye irritation
- Facial swelling
- Abnormal bleeding
- Hearing loss occur in up to a third of infections, even in people without severe illness.
- Death may occur within two weeks.



Transmission

- A certain type of rodent called a multimammate rat is the main carriers of Lassa virus. Humans can be infected from contact with rat droppings or urine, or from touching objects or eating food contaminated with these materials. People might also be able to inhale tiny particles of rat droppings in the air and become infected. Some people catch these rats for food, and could become infected from preparing and eating the rats.
- Lassa fever may also spread through blood or body fluids of an individual infected with the Lassa virus. Person-to-person transmission is common in healthcare settings where proper personal protective equipment is not available. Skin-to-skin contact without exchange of body fluids does not spread Lassa virus.

Treatment

- Ribavirin, an antiviral drug, helps treat Lassa fever patients, especially if given early.
- Treatment focuses on caring for the ill person in a secure environment. People with Lassa Fever need fluids, oxygen, and support to help their bodies fight the virus.

Prevention

- Avoiding close physical contact with infected people and their body fluids is the most important way of controlling the spread of disease.
- People sick with Lassa Fever should be cared for in a secure facility where health care providers wear protective clothing. These facilities must disinfect or dispose of equipment used in treating or caring for patients, such as needles and thermometers.
- In high-risk areas, efforts to decrease rodent populations near human homes will help prevent Lassa Fever.



All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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