

Libya records 13 cases of bubonic plague

June 17 2009

Thirteen cases of bubonic plague have been recorded in eastern Libya, near the border with Egypt, Health Minister Mohamad Hijazi told AFP on Wednesday, stressing the situation was under control.

"Thirteen cases of the plague have been recorded in a village 30 kilometres (20 miles) away from Tobruk. Eleven people have already (been treated and) left hospital," he said, without reporting any deaths.

Libyan media have spoken of between one and three fatalities.

"The situation is under control. We are leading a massive campaign to clean up and disinfect the place," said Hijazi, explaining that the illness was caused by rising rat numbers attracted by livestock being reared near homes.

He said cowsheds had been destroyed and a foreign pest control firm sent to eradicate the rats, in an operation to be supervised by a World Health Organisation (WHO) representative and a French expert.

Hijazi said the illness had previously hit Libya in the 1970s and 1980s.

The plague is "primarily a disease of rodents and their fleas, which can infect humans. It is transmitted between rodents by rodent fleas, and can be transmitted to people when infected rodent fleas bite them," according to WHO.

"Plague is a very severe disease in people, with case fatality rates of

50-60 percent if left untreated."

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