

Eight dead from Lassa fever in Benin, 170 under observation

November 27 2014

Eight people have died in the west African nation of Benin from an outbreak of Lassa fever, while 170 others have been placed under observation, officials said Thursday.

Fourteen suspected cases of the virus have been identified, with two confirmed and eight deaths in the small country bordering Nigeria, said a joint statement from the WHO, Benin's [health ministry](#) and UNICEF.

The outbreak has occurred in the north of the country of some nine million people.

"A total of 170 contacts have been identified in the towns of Tanguieta and Coby and are under daily monitoring," the statement said.

According to the WHO, Lassa fever is an acute haemorrhagic illness which belongs to the arenavirus family of viruses, which also includes the Ebola-like Marburg virus.

It was first identified in 1969 in the north Nigerian town of the same name.

The virus, which is endemic in rodents in west Africa, is transmitted to humans by contact with food or [household items](#) contaminated with the animals' faeces and urine.

Person-to-person contact is also possible through bodily fluids,

particularly in hospitals when adequate infection control measures are not taken.

People with Lassa fever do not display symptoms in 80 percent of cases but it can cause serious symptoms and death in the remainder.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that the number of Lassa fever infections in west Africa every year is between 100,000 to 300,000, with about 5,000 deaths.

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