

Nine people suspected dead of Lassa fever in Benin

February 2 2016

As the world ramps up its fight against the Zika virus, West Africa is battling to contain a growing outbreak of Lassa fever with nine people in Benin reported dead, a health official told AFP Tuesday.

"Right now, there are a total of 20 suspected cases with nine deaths," government [health official](#) Orou Bagou Yorou Chabi said.

The first Lassa [fever](#) case in the West African country of 10 million people was listed at the Hospital of St Martin de Papane, in Tchaourou, a city 350 km (220 miles) north of Cotonou, the United Nations children agency UNICEF said in a statement.

An ongoing epidemic in neighbouring Nigeria has already killed 84 people, out of 168 suspected cases, according to UNICEF.

Stocks of Ribavirin, a drug used to treat the infection, were being shipped to Tchaourou and Cotonou, the UN agency added.

Benin was last hit by a Lassa fever outbreak in October 2014, when nine people suspected of having the virus died.

Lassa fever belongs to the same family as Marburg and Ebola, two deadly viruses that lead to infections with fever, vomiting and, in worse case scenarios, haemorrhagic bleeding.

Its name is from the town of Lassa in northern Nigeria where it was first

identified in 1969.

Endemic to the region, Lassa fever is asymptomatic in 80 percent of cases but for others it can cause [internal bleeding](#), especially when diagnosed late.

The virus is spread through contact with food or household items contaminated with rats' urine or faeces or after coming in direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person.

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