

Plague-hit Madagascar bans jail visits

October 6 2017

Authorities in Madagascar Friday announced a ban on prison visits to prevent the spread of a plague epidemic that has killed 36 people in the Indian Ocean island.

"In order to protect prisoners from the [plague](#) that is spreading outside the [prison](#), we have decided to suspend family visits," prisons administrator Arsen Ralisaona told AFP.

The ban covers seven jails in the country's two worst affected regions.

The risk of contamination is high in overcrowded prisons, where conditions are usually unhygienic.

The outbreak includes [bubonic plague](#), which is spread by infected rats via flea bites, and [pneumonic plague](#), which spreads from person to person.

It has also resulted in a ban on public gatherings and forced the closure of two universities—putting pressure on the country's health facilities.

According to local media, Ambohimandra, a specialised hospital in the capital Antananarivo, was failing to cope with the influx of infected patients. Long queues had formed outside, as people flocked to buy face masks and medicine.

Madagascar suffers annual plague outbreaks, but this year the disease has affected urban areas, triggering concern from the World Health

Organisation (WHO).

The latest official toll from the plague stood at 36 on Friday, out of 258 people who have contracted the disease since August.

WHO has announced a delivery of 1.2 million doses of antibiotics to assist the country.

Most of the infections are associated with pneumonic plague - a more dangerous form of the disease that affects the lungs and is transmitted through coughing at close range.

Pneumonic plague can kill quickly, within 18 to 24 hours of infection if left untreated, but it can be cured by early use of antibiotics.

Bubonic plague which was dubbed the Black Death when it claimed an estimated 25 million lives in Europe during the Middle Ages, has become very rare.

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