

One death from Lassa fever in Britain

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One person has died in Britain from Lassa fever, health authorities said on Friday, as they announced the first three cases of the disease in the country since 2009.

The patient died at a hospital in Bedfordshire, north of London. All three people infected were from the same family in eastern England and recently travelled to West Africa.

Lassa fever, an acute viral haemorrhagic illness, belongs to the same family as the Ebola and Marburg viruses but is much less deadly.

It takes its name from the town of Lassa in northern Nigeria where it was first identified in 1969.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), a public health body, said close contacts of the patients were being traced with a view to "appropriate assessment, support and advice".

"The risk to the [general public](#) remains very low," it added.

The UKHSA confirmed on Wednesday that two other people had been diagnosed with the disease.

One of the confirmed cases recovered, while the second was receiving specialist treatment at the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust in the north of the British capital.

The hospital has a secure unit which specialises in the treatment of viral haemorrhagic fevers.

The patient who died was initially being treated as a suspected case at the Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust north of London.

The hospital confirmed the patient had the disease in a statement.

Last month, the Nigerian authorities said they were battling rising cases of the disease that claimed dozens of lives.

Infection numbers typically climb at the start of the year in a phenomenon linked to the dry season.

Humans usually become infected with the virus through exposure to food or [household items](#) contaminated with the urine or faeces of infected rats, or infected [bodily fluids](#).

It is endemic in a number of West African countries.

The UKHSA said most people with Lassa fever make a full recovery although some of those infected suffer severe illness.

There have been eight cases of Lassa fever imported to Britain since 1980. The last two cases were in 2009.

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