



Disease Tool 18

Lassa fever

Transmission

- Contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent urine or stools.
- Blood, faeces/stool, vomit, urine/pee, saliva/spit, etc. from a person sick with Lassa fever enters the mouth, nose, eyes or a skin cut of another person.
- Contact with household objects (for example, bedding or clothes) that have been contaminated with body fluids from a person who is sick or has died from Lassa fever.
- Via contaminated medical equipment, such as reused needles
- Unprotected sex with a man who has recovered from Lassa fever (for up to 3 months after he recovers).

Prevention

- Store food in rodent-proof containers.
- Dispose of rubbish away from the home (good environmental hygiene).
- Control rodents (including by keeping cats).
- Isolate (separate) people with Lassa fever.
- Use personal protective equipment (gloves, masks, clothing) when caring for sick people.
- Encourage handwashing with soap.
- Provide safe and dignified burials.
- Disinfect the homes and personal belongings of people who are sick or have died from Lassa fever.
- Promote social distancing.
- Dispose safely of waste that might be contaminated (by burning or burying it).
- Disinfect reusable supplies.
- Provide psychosocial support.

If an epidemic occurs

- Identify suspected Lassa fever cases rapidly and refer them to care and treatment centres.
- Trace contacts and follow them up.
- Use personal protective equipment (gloves, masks, clothing) when caring for sick people.
- Isolate people who are sick with Lassa fever.
- Promote social distancing.
- Promote handwashing in communities and health centres with soap, chlorine solution or hand-sanitizer.
- Provide safe and dignified burials.
- Disinfect the homes and personal belongings of people who are sick or have died from Lassa fever.
- Dispose safely of waste that might be contaminated (by burning or burying it).
- Disinfect reusable supplies.
- Male survivors of Lassa fever must practise safe sex for 3 months from the date on which they fell sick.
- Provide psychosocial support.

Symptoms

- Four out of five people with Lassa fever have no symptoms.
- Starts with fever, general weakness and feeling unwell.
- Headache, sore throat, muscle pain, chest pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, cough and stomach pain may follow.
- If severe, can include facial swelling, bleeding from the mouth, nose, vagina or anus, seizures, shaking, being confused and becoming unconscious.
- Deafness occurs in one in four people who survive Lassa fever.

Vulnerable people

- Pregnant women in the last three months of pregnancy.

Volunteer actions

See the following action tools for more information on how to take action against Lassa fever:



Community-based assessment

Make a map of the community and mark the information you gather on the map. Record other details.

- When did people start to fall sick with Lassa fever?
- How many people have fallen sick with Lassa fever? Where?
- How many have died? Where?
- How many people live in the affected community or area? How many children under 5 years of age live in the area?
- How many pregnant women live in the affected communities?
- Who and where are the vulnerable people?
- Where are the local health facilities and services? (Include traditional and community carers.)
- What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about caring for and feeding sick people?
- What are the community's burial traditions, funeral procedures and practices?
- How do people in the community store their food? (Are rats or other rodents able to eat it?)
- Are there handwashing facilities in the community or at the health centre? Are soap and water always available?
- Is a social mobilization or health promotion programme in place?
- Which sources of information do people use most?
- Are rumours or is misinformation about Lassa fever spreading in the community?
- Are health workers, volunteers or people who have survived Lassa fever stigmatized, left out, threatened or harassed? What are the main effects on them and their lives?
- Do people in the community know about Lassa fever?
- Do people in the community know the main signs of Lassa fever and what to do if someone becomes sick (phone number to call, actions to take)?
- Do people in the community know how to protect themselves from Lassa fever?
- Are people in the community taking social distancing seriously? Why? Why not?