

# Lassa fever

February 15, 2022

**In news**— One of the three persons diagnosed with Lassa fever in the UK has died on February 11.

## About Lassa fever-

- It is **an acute viral haemorrhagic illness caused by Lassa virus**, a member of the arena-virus Family of viruses.
- The **Lassa virus is named after a town in Nigeria where the first cases were discovered** in 1969.
- The virus is a **single-stranded RNA virus** belonging to the virus family *Arenaviridae*.
- The **fever is spread by rats** and is **endemic in the rodent population in parts of West Africa** – Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Togo and Nigeria.
- **Symptoms typically appear 1-3 weeks after exposure.**
- Mild symptoms include slight fever, fatigue, weakness and headache and more serious symptoms include bleeding, difficulty breathing, vomiting, facial swelling, pain in the chest, back, and abdomen and shock.
- Death can occur from two weeks of the onset of symptoms, usually as a result of multi-organ failure.

## **LASSA FEVER**



### What is Lassa fever?

Lassa fever is a viral illness that typically occurs in West Africa.

### How is Lassa fever spread?

The Lassa virus is transmitted to humans mainly through handling rats, food or household items contaminated by rats' urine and faeces.

The virus can spread between people through direct contact with the body fluids of a person infected with Lassa fever, as well as contaminated bedding and clothing.

You cannot get Lassa fever through hugging, shaking hands or sitting near someone.



### What are the symptoms of Lassa fever?

Symptoms of Lassa fever typically occur 2-21 days after coming into contact with the virus. Many people who are infected do not show symptoms.

- Fever
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Chest and muscle pain
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- Facial swelling
- In severe cases, bleeding from the mouth, nose, vagina or gastro-intestinal tract



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- Humans usually become infected with Lassa virus **through exposure to food or household items contaminated with urine or faeces of infected Mastomys rats.**
- **It can also be spread, though rarely, if a person comes in contact with a sick person's infected bodily fluids** or through mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose or the mouth.
- **Person-to-person infections and laboratory transmission can also occur,** particularly in health care settings in the absence of adequate infection prevention and control measures.
- **The overall case-fatality rate is 1%.** Among patients who are hospitalized with the severe clinical presentation of Lassa fever, case-fatality is estimated at around 15%.
- **Early supportive care with rehydration and symptomatic treatment** improves survival.
- About 80% of people who become infected with Lassa virus have no symptoms.
- 1 in 5 infections result in severe disease, where the virus affects several organs such as the liver, spleen and kidneys.