



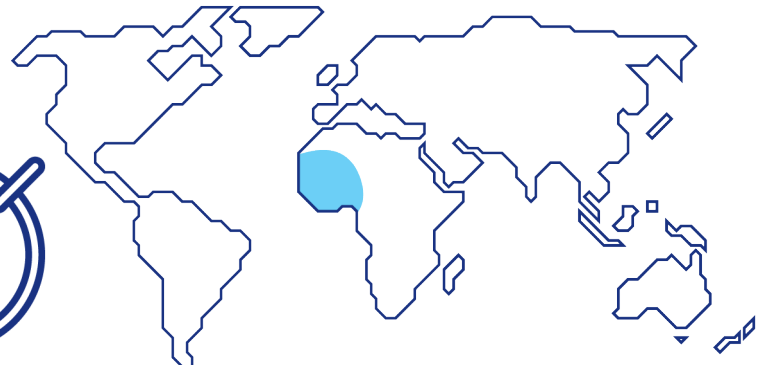
What

Lassa fever is caused by a virus. The Lassa fever virus may circulate among a specific rat type. This animal may excrete the virus in urine and droppings for a long time. Humans may get infected through inhalation, or directly by contact with bodily fluid of an infected individual. After infection the virus may spread to all organs.



Who

Lassa fever is endemic in parts of West Africa. People living in endemic regions and those caring for infected individuals are at the greatest risk of contracting the virus. Several cases have been confirmed in international travelers who stayed in traditional dwellings in rural areas. However, travelers are generally not at high risk.



Where and when

Lassa fever is primarily endemic in the forested regions of Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, and Mali. Other neighboring countries may also be at risk, as the specific rats that carry the virus are distributed throughout the region. Cases of Lassa fever can occur at any time of the year, but the peak incidence typically occurs in March, during the transition from the dry to the wet season. Your healthcare professional can provide information about the most recent outbreaks.

Prevention

Currently, there is no vaccine available for the Lassa fever virus, although research is ongoing. The most important preventive measures focus on avoiding contact with rodents that may carry and excrete the virus. Residents and travelers should store food in rodent-proof containers, trap rodents in and around homes, and avoid consuming rodents as a food source. Blood and bodily fluid specimens from individuals with suspected infection should be treated as highly infectious. Infection prevention measures should be strictly followed.



Treatment

Treatment of patients who have developed Lassa fever consists of supportive care, which includes ensuring adequate oxygenation, maintaining blood pressure, and providing fluid replacement. Additionally, antiviral treatment can reduce mortality when administered within the first 6 days of illness.

Symptoms

The incubation period for Lassa fever is typically 5-21 days, with an average of 9 days. About 80% of infected individuals experience no significant symptoms and recover spontaneously within 8-10 days. Symptoms in the remaining patients may include pharyngitis, cough, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and pain in the muscles, chest, back, and abdomen. In severe cases, complications such as lung edema, hypotension, shock, seizures, coma, and bleeding from the mouth, nose, vagina, or gastrointestinal tract may develop.



In case of infection

Approximately 10% of people who contract Lassa virus infection develop serious illness. Another 10-20% of this group may experience severe mucosal bleeding. The mortality rate for individuals with mild to severe disease is estimated to be around 15-25% without antiviral treatment. Among those who recover, about 25% experience hearing loss, which improves over time in approximately half of these cases.