

Two dead from Ebola-like Lassa fever in Benin: officials

21 November 2014

Two people have died in Benin from the Ebola-like virus Lassa fever, the country's government and a World Health Organization (WHO) official said on Friday.

"After samples were taken and testing, the results came back positive for Lassa fever, which is similar to the Ebola virus but not as virulent," public health minister Dorothee Akoko Kinde-Gazard said.

The two people were among five [health workers](#) who died at a hospital in Tanguieta, in the north of the tiny West African nation which borders Nigeria to the west.

"There were five deaths at the hospital in Tanguieta but from the samples taken only two were positive (for Lassa fever)," she told AFP.

Gazard said that "no other case has yet been brought to our attention".

The WHO's representative in the country, Youssouf Gamatie, was quoted as saying in the Benin media: "It's lucky that we have detected it in the initial phase."

Benin's authorities said they were expecting additional medication to deal with any further cases.

According to the WHO, Lassa fever is an acute haemorrhagic illness which belongs to the arenavirus family of viruses, which also includes the Ebola-like Marburg virus.

It was first identified in 1969 in the north Nigerian town of the same name.

The [virus](#), which is endemic in rodents in west Africa, is transmitted to humans by contact with food or household items contaminated with the animals' faeces and urine.

Person-to-person contact is also possible through bodily fluids, particularly in hospitals when adequate infection control measures are not taken.

People with Lassa fever do not display symptoms in 80 percent of cases but it can cause serious symptoms and death in the remainder.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that the number of Lassa [fever](#) infections in west Africa every year is between 100,000 to 300,000, with about 5,000 deaths.

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