



## **LASSA FEVER**

Lassa fever is an Acute Viral Haemorrhagic Fever illness which is endemic in the West Africa. The incubation period is 6-21 days. Lassa fever virus is transmitted to humans via contact with food or household items contaminated with the urine, saliva faeces, and blood of the rodent *Multi-mammate* rat. The disease is endemic in the rodent population in parts of West Africa and the multi-mammate rat serve as reservoir for the virus. Person-to-person infections and laboratory transmission can also occur, particularly in hospitals lacking adequate infection prevent and control measures.

### **Symptoms**

The onset of LF illness is often gradual, with non-specific signs and symptoms and commonly presents with fever, general weakness and malaise at the early onset. After a few days, headache, sore throat, muscle pain, chest pain, vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain may follow. Severe cases may progress to show facial swelling, and bleeding tendencies (from mouth, nose, vagina or gastrointestinal tract, and low blood pressure. Shock, seizures, disorientation, and coma may be seen in the late stages. Complications include: deafness, transient hair loss and gait disturbance may occur during recovery. About 80 % of Lassa fever infections are mild or asymptomatic.

### **Prevention**

**Putting food away in rodent-proof containers and keeping the home clean help to discourage rodents from entering homes.** Thus proper personal hygiene is the effective way to prevent rodent access to food preparation areas etc. Using these rodents as a food source is not recommended. Blocking and/or screening possible entry points such as eaves and drains and trapping in and around homes can help reduce rodent populations.

When caring for patients with Lassa fever, further transmission of the disease through person-to-person contact or nosocomial routes can be avoided by taking preventive precautions against contact with patient secretions (called VHF isolation precautions or barrier nursing methods). Such precautions include wearing protective clothing, such as masks, gloves, gowns, and goggles; using infection control measures, such as complete equipment sterilization; and isolating infected patients from contact with unprotected persons until the disease has run its course.



Furthermore, educating people in high-risk areas about ways to decrease rodent populations in their homes and all other facilities where there is the likelihood of habourage of these rodents will aid in the control and prevention of Lassa fever.

A vaccine is yet to be developed for Lassa fever.

***ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT, AND SO LET'S MAKE FOOD SAFETY OUR LIFESTYLE AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY.***