



Lassa fever

Why in News?

Recently, three persons diagnosed with **Lassa fever** in the UK died. The cases have been linked to **travel to west African countries**.

What is Lassa Fever?

▪ About:

- The Lassa fever-causing virus is found **in West Africa and was first discovered in 1969 in Lassa, Nigeria**.
- The fever is spread by rats and is primarily found in countries in **West Africa including Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Nigeria** where it is endemic.
 - **Matomys rats** has the potential to spread the deadly Lassa virus.
- The **death rate associated with this disease is low, at around 1%**. But the death rate is higher for certain individuals, such as pregnant women in their third trimester.
- According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, **about 80% of the cases are asymptomatic** and therefore remain undiagnosed.

▪ Transmission:

- A person can become infected if **they come in contact with household items of food that is contaminated with the urine or feces of an infected rat (zoonotic disease)**.
- 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 transmission is more common in healthcare settings.

▪ Symptoms:

- **Mild symptoms include** slight fever, fatigue, weakness and headache.
- **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**.

▪ Treatment:

- The **antiviral drug ribavirin** seems to be an effective treatment for Lassa fever if given early on in the course of clinical illness.

[Source: IE](#)

