

Nigeria: 'Largest-ever' outbreak of Lassa fever contained but monitoring still needed, says UN health agency

With the largest-ever outbreak of the deadly Lassa fever in Nigeria having been contained, continued vigilance is vital to deal with any flare-ups, the United Nations health agency warned on Friday.

The [outbreak](#), which started in Ogun province in south-west Nigeria in December 2016, spread across much of the country and into neighbouring Benin, Togo and Burkina Faso.

In all, 423 cases had been confirmed in Nigeria and 106 people, including eight health workers, lost their lives. Over the past six weeks, however, the number of new cases have dropped and it is no longer considered to be a national health emergency, according to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO).

"Nigeria is to be congratulated for reaching this important milestone in the fight against Lassa fever," Ibrahima Socé Fall, Regional Emergencies Director for Africa at the UN agency, said in a [news release](#).

["But we cannot let our foot off the pedal.](#) We must use the lessons learnt to better prepare at-risk countries in our region to conduct rapid detection and response."

WHO continues to support Nigerian government efforts to respond effectively to the disease and has urged local communities to remain vigilant and report "any rumours" of new cases to the authorities.

"Early diagnosis and treatment can save lives," said Wondimagegnehu Alemu, the head of WHO programmes in Nigeria.

The UN health agency has also called on health workers to stay on high alert for Lassa fever when handling patients, irrespective of their health status.

["Lassa fever](#) should always be considered in patients with fever, headache, sore throat and general body weakness, especially when malaria has been ruled out with a rapid diagnostic test (RDT), and when patients are not improving," advised WHO.

Health workers should adhere to standard precautions, and wear protective equipment like gloves, face masks, face shields and aprons when handling suspected Lassa fever patients, it added.

[Lassa fever is a viral infection](#), primarily transmitted to humans through contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent urine, faeces, or blood.