

Beat: Health

New cholera outbreak in Nigeria kills 74, sickens hundreds

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USPA News - A new outbreak of cholera in various parts of Nigeria has killed at least 74 people and sickened hundreds more, health authorities said on Tuesday, warning that the number of cases is likely to rise. It follows two outbreaks in 2010 and 2011 that killed more than 2,500 people combined.

Cases of the infection, caused by ingesting contaminated food or water, were reported in the states of Plateau, Sokoto, Zamfara and Lagos in recent weeks, according to Nigeria's health ministry. As of Tuesday, at least 74 people had died of the illness while no less than 300 others were infected, although the actual figures are likely higher. The ministry said it was working with the affected states to contain the outbreak and urged Nigerians to take seriously the issue of sanitation. Nigeria is no stranger to cholera outbreaks as West and Central Africa are extremely vulnerable because access rates to water and sanitation in the region are among the lowest in the world. Cholera is an acute intestinal infection caused by eating food or drinking water contaminated with the bacterium known as vibrio cholerae. The disease has a short incubation period and produces a toxin that causes continuous watery diarrhea, a condition that can quickly lead to severe dehydration and death if treatment is not administered promptly. Vomiting also occurs in most patients. Although response measures can help contain its spread, the most effective way of fighting the disease is to tackle its cause by ensuring access to clean water and raising awareness of the importance of sanitation and hygiene standards. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 58 percent of Nigerians have access to an improved water source but only 32 percent of Nigerians have access to proper sanitation facilities. Cholera first reached Nigeria in December 1970, leading to an epidemic that killed at least 2,945 people and sickened around 20,000 others by the end of 1971. It was followed by a devastating outbreak in 1991, killing at least 7,654 people and sickening more than 52,000 others in an epidemic that affected nearly the entire country. Most recently, at least 1,716 people were killed and 40,000 others were sickened in a cholera outbreak that affected half of the country in 2010. A second outbreak began in late February 2011, reaching a peak of 1,200 weekly cases at the beginning of April. By the end of 2011, at least 715 people had died of the disease and nearly 22,000 others were infected.

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