

## **GASTROENTERITIS OUTBREAK IN LAGOS**

In the month of October, the Biosecurity team at the Ministry of Health noticed unusual cases of gastroenteritis (vomiting and diarrhea) recorded in health facilities across five Local Governments Areas (LGAs) in the state namely Lagos Island, Ajeromi, Mushin, Apapa and Ikeja.

The cases were investigated by the Rapid response Teams (RRTs) of the affected LGAs led by the Medical Officers of health (MOHs). As of 30th Oct 2019, 125 cases had been identified, 117 of which had been treated and discharged while the remaining cases were still receiving treatment at different healthcare facilities across the State. By the end of the first week in November, the cases had increased to 400 recorded in different health facilities in the affected LGAs. 370 of those cases were treated and discharged. Unfortunately, 11 deaths occurred due to the outbreak.

The team embarked on appropriate contact tracing for more cases in the community and other health facilities. They also sent samples to the laboratory to confirm the pathogen responsible for the gastroenteritis. Some of the samples tested positive for a type of cholera but it has not been confirmed that cholera is responsible for the entire outbreak of diarrhea and vomiting but samples have been sent to other laboratories for further analysis to ascertain if there are other pathogens contributing to the outbreak.

As part of the response of the State Ministry of Health, an emergency operation centre (EOC) which is a command and control centre was activated to fine tune logistics and resources around the response against the outbreak and it is domiciled in the State Ministry of Health.

Since the activation, the EOC which is made up of representatives from the Ministry of Health, Primary Health Care Board, Health Service Commission, Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA), World Health Organization and Central Public Health Laboratory, LASUTH Epidemiology Unit amongst others have been meeting on a daily basis; collating results, reviewing plans and interventions as well as suggesting and coordinating the implementation of measures to effectively curtail the spread of the disease and manage future occurrences promptly and effectively.

The EOC is made up of sub thematic areas of research, surveillance, case management and infection control, laboratory, communication and advocacy, pharmacy, security as well as logistics

and data management. Also, the disease surveillance officers at the State and local government levels have been carrying out intensive surveillance to stop the spread of the disease.

The recent increase in rainfall and resultant flooding of some of the LGAs have been implicated as a likely factor in the spread of the infections. Lagos is also prone to seasonal infectious diseases like gastroenteritis because of its demography and low line megacity nature.

Efforts have been intensified on awareness and sensitization campaigns on the highest standard of personal and environmental hygiene in the affected LGAs and beyond. Surveillance has also strengthened in all the LGAs to detect, report and deal with any suspected case of cholera and gastroenteritis.

Some measures and specific action plans are also being carried out like the upgrade of infrastructure in health facilities especially the PHC level; recruitment of more health workers; increasing the supply of drugs and consumables to health facilities; continuous clearing of drains and improving the supply of clean and portable water to residents, so that in the future, when the climatic situation where there are excessive rains occur, the state would be in a better position to respond quickly and in a more efficacious way.

The general public have been advised to watch out for the symptoms of the infection which include passage of watery stool and profuse vomiting.

Gastroenteritis is caused by micro-organisms like those causing typhoid fever, cholera and certain viruses. It can be contacted by eating or drinking contaminated foods such as uncooked seafood.

Patients with gastroenteritis present with severe acute watery diarrhea and profuse vomiting. Those infected with micro-organisms causing the disease shows signs and symptoms within 12 hours to one week after ingesting contaminated food or water. The disease affects both children and adult and can kill within hours if untreated.

Members of the public have hereby been advised to take precautionary measures by paying due attention to personal hygiene and environmental sanitation by keeping their environment clean, avoiding open defecation, ensuring drains are clean and imbibe the culture of regular hand washing.

They have been encouraged to wash their hands with soaps and water frequently and thoroughly, boil their water before drinking especially if the source is in doubts, wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating; cook food thoroughly and dispose waste material properly. They have also been advised to visit nearest health facilities early when they are sick and avoid going to work or school where they are likely to infect others.

Health workers have also been advised to take universal safety precautions when dealing with patients, practice good hand washing techniques and report any alarming increase in cases of gastroenteritis-vomiting and diarrhea to the Medical Officer of Health in their local government or the Directorate of Disease Control.

*For reports, clarification and more information on the outbreak of gastroenteritis, citizens and health workers can contact the Directorate of Disease Control through these lines: 08023169485 and 08023608195.*