



Dear colleagues and partners,

Welcome to the third edition of the Lassa Lens Initiative, your quarterly insight into the ongoing efforts to combat Lassa fever across the ECOWAS region. This platform is a shared space for knowledge, collaboration, and collective action against one of the region's most persistent public health threats.

As we enter the third quarter of 2025, the urgency of our mission is once again underscored by the latest data: between March and early June, the ECOWAS region recorded 5,824 suspected Lassa fever cases, 767 confirmed infections, and 149 deaths across five member states. These figures reflect the enduring burden of the disease and the need to continue building strong, resilient, and coordinated preparedness and response systems.

This issue celebrates significant strides in partnership and policy. We highlight WAHO's deepened ties with WHO AFRO, reinforcing our alignment on health security and other priority focus areas. The recently concluded 26th ECOWAS Assembly of Health Ministers in Cabo Verde brought together 12 Member States and partners to adopt a new Regional Community Health Policy, reaffirm political

backing for the Lassa Fever Vaccine Coalition, align on strategies for pooled procurement and pharmaceutical industry initiatives, and advance progress towards sustainable health financing.

We’re excited to share that in May 2025; a new Lassa therapeutics trial began. The INTEGRATE trial kicked off patient enrollment at Nigeria’s Federal Medical Centre Owo (FMCO). Over the next five years, this adaptive Phase II–III study—led by ALIMA in collaboration with the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital and FMCO, will test new treatment regimens against ribavirin to see if they can better prevent death and organ failure in hospitalized Lassa fever patients. After its start in Nigeria, INTEGRATE will roll out to other West African sites as they’re ready, marking a major step forward in our shared effort to bring more effective treatments to those affected.

Looking ahead, the **2nd ECOWAS Lassa Fever International Conference (LIC)** has been rescheduled to September 8–12, 2025, in Abidjan under the theme “Beyond Borders: Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Combat Lassa Fever and Emerging Infectious Diseases.” We extend our gratitude to the Government of Côte d’Ivoire for hosting this event, which offers an opportunity for Member States and our partners to reflect on research and development (R&D) efforts, enhance outbreak preparedness, and foster cross-border collaboration for Lassa fever and other emerging infectious diseases.

As you explore this edition, you’ll find updates on the latest epidemiological trends, frontline worker stories, R&D efforts, new partnerships, and upcoming opportunities for engagement.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

Dr. Melchior Athanase Joël C. AISSI
Director General
West African Health Organization (WAHO)



LASSA IN NUMBERS

01 January – 01 June 2025

		CONFIRMED CASES	DEATHS
	Nigeria	747	142
	Liberia	9	0
	Guinea	2	2
	Sierra Leone	9	5



Source: WHO Epidemiology Bulletin; Africa CDC Epidemiology Bulletin; NCDC sitrep

PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE ACTIVITIES



This section spotlights recent actions, collaborations, and interventions led by the Lassa Coalition across the ECOWAS region.

Building Sustainable Regional Partnerships; WAHO engagement with WHO AFRO:

In May 2025, WAHO engaged with WHO-AFRO through a meeting with the Acting Regional Director, Dr Chikwe Ihekweazu and other experts. The meeting was an important opportunity to strengthen strategic collaboration and align on future priorities for health in West Africa, including on Lassa fever.

WAHO and WHO-AFRO share a longstanding and productive partnership, formalized by a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2016. This agreement laid the foundation for joint efforts in health promotion, disease prevention, epidemic preparedness and response, maternal and child health, and health systems strengthening. Beyond this formal framework, our collaboration has extended to critical areas such as antimicrobial resistance monitoring, genomic sequencing, strengthening health information systems, and the World Bank-supported REDISSE project, which has facilitated the implementation of Joint External Evaluations, After-Action Reviews and National Action Plans for Health Security across ECOWAS Member States.

The recent engagement allowed us to reflect on the successes and lessons learned from previous collaborations, while identifying new areas of focus in health security, primary health care, and the drive towards Universal Health Coverage. It was also an important moment to deepen our shared understanding of the political, humanitarian, and security dynamics that continue to shape health outcomes in the region. We explored the potential for joint strategies to address critical and emerging challenges, including climate-sensitive health risks, non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, sustainable financing, and pandemic preparedness.

ECOWAS Assembly of Health Ministers 2025:

The 26th Ordinary Assembly of the ECOWAS Health Ministers was held in Cabo Verde on 10 May 2025, bringing together health ministers, technical partners, and stakeholders from across the region. The opening ceremony, chaired by the Prime Minister of Cabo Verde, H.E. Ulisses Correia e Silva, featured addresses from several dignitaries, including the Minister of Health of Cabo Verde, the Director General of WAHO, and representatives from AFD, AUDA-NEPAD, and the ECOWAS Commission. The Prime Minister underscored the importance of building a resilient, equitable, and efficient regional health system to improve well-being and productivity.

The Assembly welcomed a presentation on the Lassa fever Coalition and ongoing cooperation between WAHO and CEPI, reaffirming political support for Lassa vaccine development and broader epidemic preparedness.

The Assembly featured and adopted a resolution approving the Regional Community Health Policy as well as the Regional Guidance Framework for the Development or Adaptation of a National Community Health Strategy within the region. This resolution underscores the commitment to strengthening community-based health systems as essential for improving access, equity, and responsiveness to local health needs across the ECOWAS region.

Ministers committed to promoting health research including Lassa vaccine R&D, scaling up local pharmaceutical production, and advancing a pooled procurement mechanism to ensure access to affordable and quality-assured medicines.

[Read More](#)

<https://www.wahooas.org/web-ooas/en/actualites/26th-ordinary-session-assembly-health-ministers-ecowas-opens-waho-liaison-officers>

Nigeria Health Watch, Corona Management Systems, and Bloom Public Health Join the Lassa Coalition:

Three prominent West African health organisations, Corona Management Systems, Nigeria Health Watch, and Bloom Public Health, have officially joined the Lassa Fever Coalition, a strategic initiative led by WAHO and supported by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. This marks a significant step forward in the region's effort to combat Lassa fever and prepare for the equitable introduction of the world’s first licensed Lassa fever vaccine.

The announcement was made at the annual ECOWAS Assembly of Health Ministers Meeting, where regional leaders gathered to discuss priorities for strengthening health systems and epidemic preparedness.

The new partners will support the Coalition Secretariat, hosted by WAHO, to strengthen locally led coordination across the five most-affected countries: Benin, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Their involvement enhances the Coalition’s ability to drive vaccine research, development, and future rollout across the region.

Demand Forecast Working Group (DFWG):

As part of ongoing efforts to refine a model structure for the Lassa fever vaccine demand forecast, the Lassa fever coalition has established a Working Group in collaboration with partners including CEPI and IAVI.

The DFWG chaired by WAHO held its inaugural workshop in May 2025, focused on an introduction of the scope of work, discussions around the value for the region and ensuring equitable representation and inputs. Members of the group include representatives from WHO AFRO, Africa CDC, civil society, academia and other regional and national partners.

The DFWG is expected to remain active until the end of 2025 initially, with interim results to be presented at the Lassa fever International Conference in September 2025.

Webinar: Strengthening Medical Countermeasure R&D Coordination for Emerging Infectious Diseases: Applications of the Lassa Vaccine Coalition

The latest edition of the ECOWAS R&D Lassa Fever Webinar Series Themed: “Strengthening Medical Countermeasure R&D Coordination for Emerging Infectious Diseases: Applications of the Lassa Vaccine Coalition” held on Thursday, 26th June 2025.

This webinar was focused on strengthening coordination for Lassa fever R&D and other infectious diseases by spotlighting country experiences, challenges, and opportunities for alignment with regional and global efforts. It will examine the diversity of coordination structures across countries, including task forces, technical working groups and steering committees, curating best practices and lessons learnt for adaptation in other contexts.

Missed it? Watch the playback here:
https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/a0mNKU2CiDeTq3vmanBsxxk4pFrEDwW-bS-i5_xZYPopA4KwKa6izmlMrIW9Y-zu.7mK0e4Xw6JD3YH3W?startTime=1750935541000
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Policy Research Working Group

The Lassa fever Coalition is working to develop a Lassa fever Research Agenda through the Policy Research Working Group (PRWG).

This effort is grounded in the Child Health and Nutrition Research Initiative (CHNRI) methodology, a globally recognized approach that facilitates systematically identifying, scoring, and prioritising research questions.

The agenda seeks to capture both the scientific complexities and on-the-ground realities of responding to Lassa fever and ultimately produce data-driven, policy-relevant evidence to inform future vaccine introduction decisions and strengthen the region's public health strategies.

Between February and March 2025, a prioritisation survey yielded over 230 responses from stakeholders across West Africa and beyond, and a stratified analysis has helped highlight differences in priorities across stakeholder groups. Moving forward, the working group will be aiming to validate the agenda, selecting the most relevant questions by score, thematic grouping, or a hybrid of government and stakeholder priorities.

The result is a targeted, policy-oriented research agenda to guide investment and decision-making around Lassa fever vaccines.

PROGRESS ON LASSA R&D EFFORTS IN THE REGION

This section provides brief, actionable updates on Lassa fever R&D activities across West African countries, including diagnostics, treatment, and prevention initiatives. It will provide a snapshot of the latest developments in the region and beyond West Africa.



ENABLE 1.5 Study in Nigeria - Activities and Progress:

Following the successful completion of Tier 1 (T1) activities, which involved the first quarterly follow-up and blood sample collection at AEFUTHA Abakaliki, FMC Owo, and ISTH Irrua, the ENABLE 1.5 project has now transitioned into Tier 2 (T2). These time points correspond to Month 3 (T1) and Month 6 (T2) of follow-up under the Infection Cohort, which investigates the incidence of Lassa virus infection. While data analysis from T1 is currently ongoing, T2 activities are progressing well across all sites, with no confirmed Lassa virus infections reported to date.

The ENABLE Coordination Team has completed site visits to provide oversight and technical support, and T2 activities are expected to conclude next month. Insights from this phase will inform preparations for the subsequent round of follow-up—Tier 3 (T3), corresponding to Month 9.

Additionally, confirmatory testing of ENABLE 1.0 samples has been completed. This marks a key milestone in validating baseline data on Lassa fever cases and supports the robustness of ongoing and future analyses.

Community engagement continues to be a core component of the project. Advocacy efforts remain active at each study site. While the newly launched Rumor Management Tool is still in its early implementation stage and substantive insights are not yet available, sites are being actively encouraged to document and report emerging rumors. This proactive approach to rumor surveillance is already contributing to the project's strategy to sustain community trust and participation.

Overall, ENABLE 1.5 continues to make strong progress in generating valuable data that will support the development of an effective Lassa fever vaccine.



Lassa Therapeutic Trials

In May 2025, the INTEGRATE clinical trial enrolled its first patients at the Federal Medical Centre Owo (FMCO) in Nigeria, one of West Africa’s foremost Lassa fever treatment centers. This landmark, five-year study, coordinated by ALIMA in partnership with the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital, and FMCO, will rigorously evaluate promising new drug candidates against the current standard of care.

INTEGRATE is a multinational, multicenter, controlled, randomized, adaptive Phase II–III platform trial. Its primary goal is to determine whether investigational regimens outperform ribavirin in preventing death or organ failure among hospitalized patients with confirmed Lassa fever. After its successful launch in Nigeria, INTEGRATE will expand to additional West African sites as they become operational, advancing our collective mission to deliver more effective treatments for Lassa fever.



Lassa Fever Research Advances at Phebe Hospital:

Ongoing Lassa fever research at Phebe Hospital, in collaboration with the University of North Carolina, is generating valuable insights into the epidemiology, symptoms, and immune response to Lassa virus (LASV). Preliminary findings from the PREPARE study indicate that over 10% of patients presenting with fever at Phebe Hospital tested positive for LASV by PCR. Among confirmed cases, researchers observed that the symptom pattern was in two phases and noted differences in viral load and antibody levels between survivors and fatalities. Preliminary data also suggest that hearing loss related to Lassa fever can vary significantly in timing and severity, with some cases resolving and others persisting.

The ENABLE studies further expand on these findings. ENABLE 1.0 revealed shifting patterns in LASV IgG seropositivity among approximately 500 participants over time, while the MAGPIX sub-study found widespread exposure to multiple viruses—including Ebola, Marburg, and Yellow Fever—suggesting broader spillover risks. LASV seropositivity was more common in adults and linked to the presence of rat holes near homes. The ENABLE 1.5 phase has now enrolled 1,000 participants and is investigating Lassa fever incidence, symptom profiles, and co-infection with malaria.



LASSARAB Vaccine Trial Begins Enrolment in the U.S:

In March 2025, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced the start of enrolment for a clinical trial to evaluate a promising Lassa fever vaccine candidate known as LASSARAB. The Phase 1 trial is taking place at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, assessing the safety and immune response of three different concentrations of the vaccine in up to 55 healthy adults aged 18 to 50.

LASSARAB is a novel candidate based on an inactivated rabies vaccine, genetically modified to express both rabies proteins and the Lassa virus glycoprotein precursor complex (GPC). The vaccine was developed by an NIH-supported team at Thomas Jefferson University, and preclinical trials in nonhuman primates have shown promising results: two doses, administered 28 days apart, protected all immunised animals from lethal Lassa virus exposure. If successful, LASSARAB could represent a dual-purpose vaccine—offering protection against both Lassa fever and rabies. As the global community intensifies vaccine research, LASSARAB joins a growing pipeline of candidate vaccines advancing toward clinical use—contributing to regional efforts led by WAHO through the Lassa fever Coalition.

A Champion on the Frontlines of Lassa Fever Response;

Dr. Ayodeji Oladele Oluwafemi

This is a human-interest feature profiling an individual or organisation actively engaged in Lassa fever surveillance, research, response, or advocacy within the ECOWAS region.



In this edition's Frontline Worker Spotlight, we turn our lens to Dr. Ayodeji Oladele Oluwafemi, a public health physician whose tireless work has shaped Nigeria's Lassa fever response and built resilience in one of the region's most affected areas.

Q: Who am I?

A: I'm Dr. Ayodeji Oladele Oluwafemi, a Consultant Special Grade 1 and Head of the Infection Control & Research Unit at Federal Medical Centre, Owo. I lead our Lassa fever Emergency Operation Centre and have coordinated our COVID-19 response. I also serve on national research consortia and examine for the West African College of Physicians.

Q: What is my role in Lassa fever response?

A: I first engaged in Lassa fever work in 2007 after attending a conference in Abuja. As Head of Community Medicine, I formed our hospital's response team in 2010, established Infection Prevention & Control in 2014, and activated our full Emergency Operation Centre in 2016. Since 2017, I've overseen our 40-bed Lassa treatment wards, now among Nigeria's leading centers, coordinating surveillance, lab diagnostics, risk communication, case management, and more.

Q: What are the toughest parts of my work?

A: Outbreak periods demand around-the-clock coordination across all EOC pillars, daily feedback meetings, advocacy for resources, and high-stress field operations. Keeping the team motivated under heavy caseloads is challenging, but saving preventable lives keeps us going.

Q: Why did I choose medicine?

A: My passion began in secondary school when my father shared how his mother died in childbirth with no local healthcare available. He vowed one of his children would become a doctor, and I committed to saving lives. That drive led me to study medicine at Obafemi Awolowo University and specialize in Community Medicine.

Q: Can you share a moment that changed me?

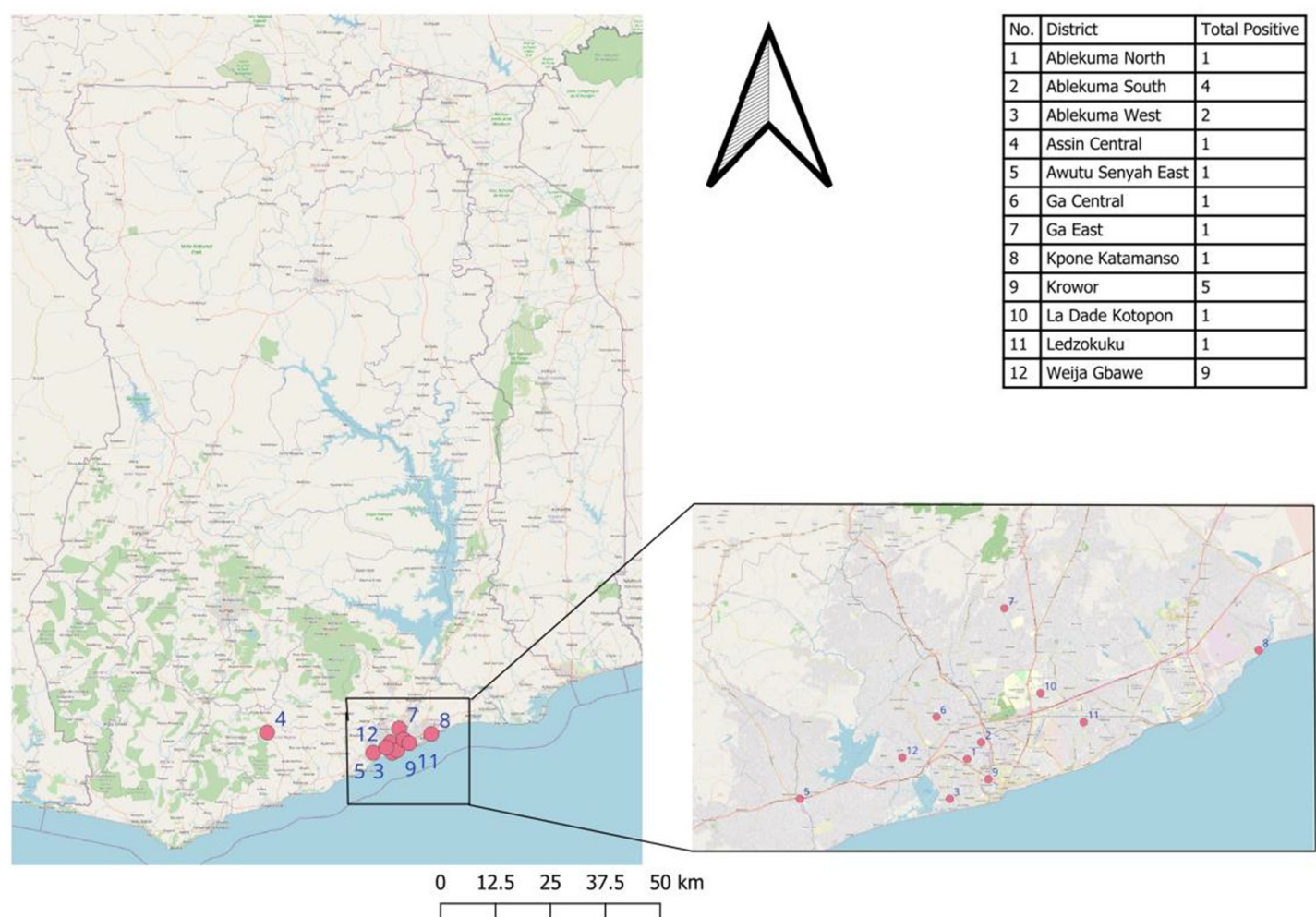
A: In September 2019, my wife developed Lassa fever. As both her physician and our EOC coordinator, I saw firsthand how vital empathy and psychosocial support are for patients and families. More recently, in 2023, we managed two doctors and a nurse who contracted Lassa on our neonatal ward, one required ICU and survived.

Q: What do I want others to know?

A: Lassa fever is both preventable and treatable when caught early. Frontline teams risk their lives every day and need ongoing support, adequate PPE, diagnostics, pharmaceuticals, security, insurance, and incentives. With strong policies and community cooperation, we can curb this scourge. Let's join hands to save our people from Lassa fever.

INSIGHTS AND ANALYSIS

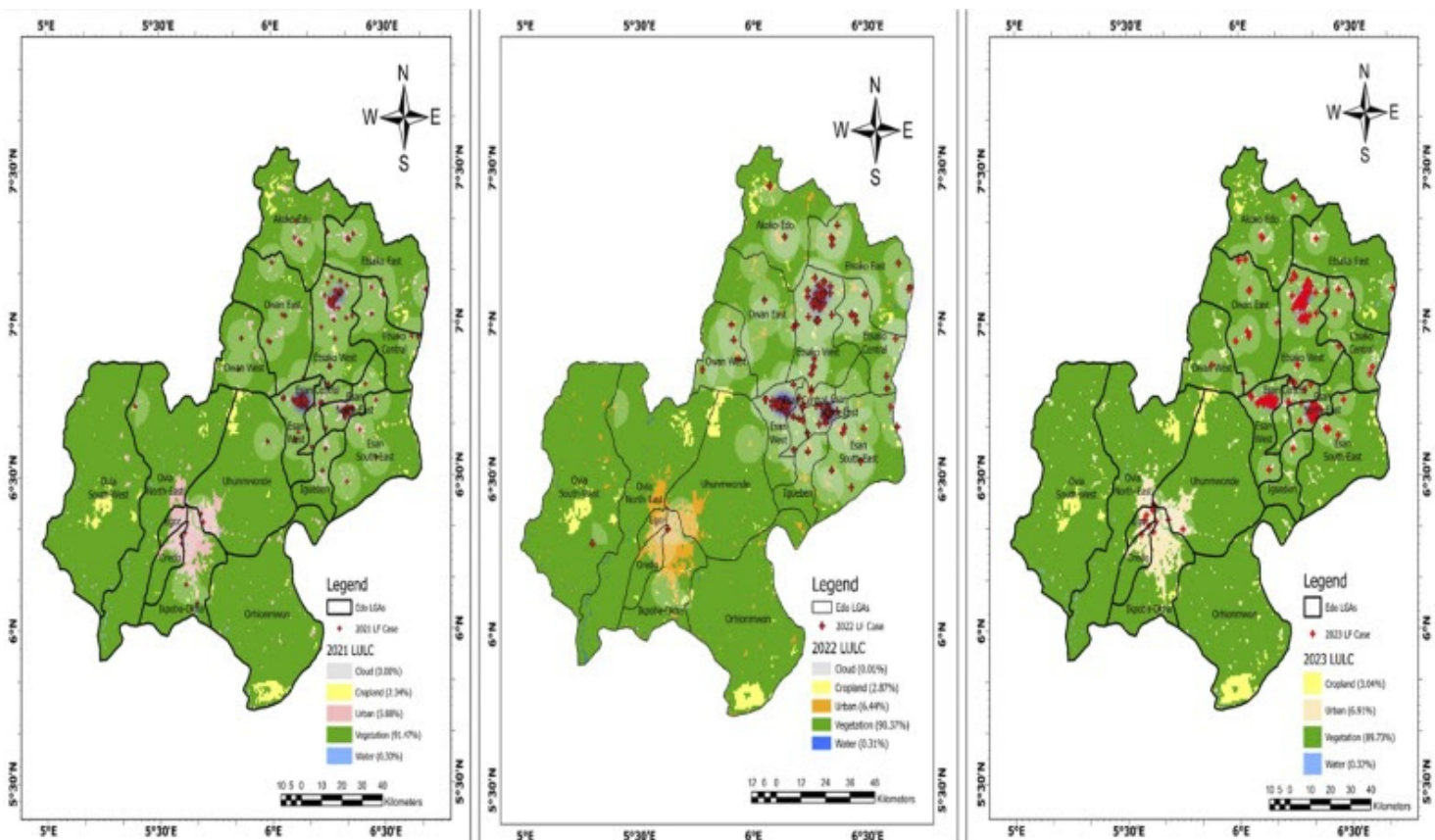
Epidemiological Trends & Surveillance:



The epidemiology of Lassa Fever in Ghana:

A recent study examining the 2023 Lassa fever outbreak in Ghana revealed that although many suspected cases were reported, only a small proportion were confirmed. Unlike previous findings from other regions, no significant difference in infection rates was observed between males and females. However, age proved to be a more critical factor, with young adults, particularly those aged 25 to 44—accounting for approximately three-quarters of confirmed cases.

These findings mirror trends seen in countries like Nigeria and emphasize the importance of focused surveillance and preventive efforts among working-age populations, while ensuring continued monitoring across all demographics.

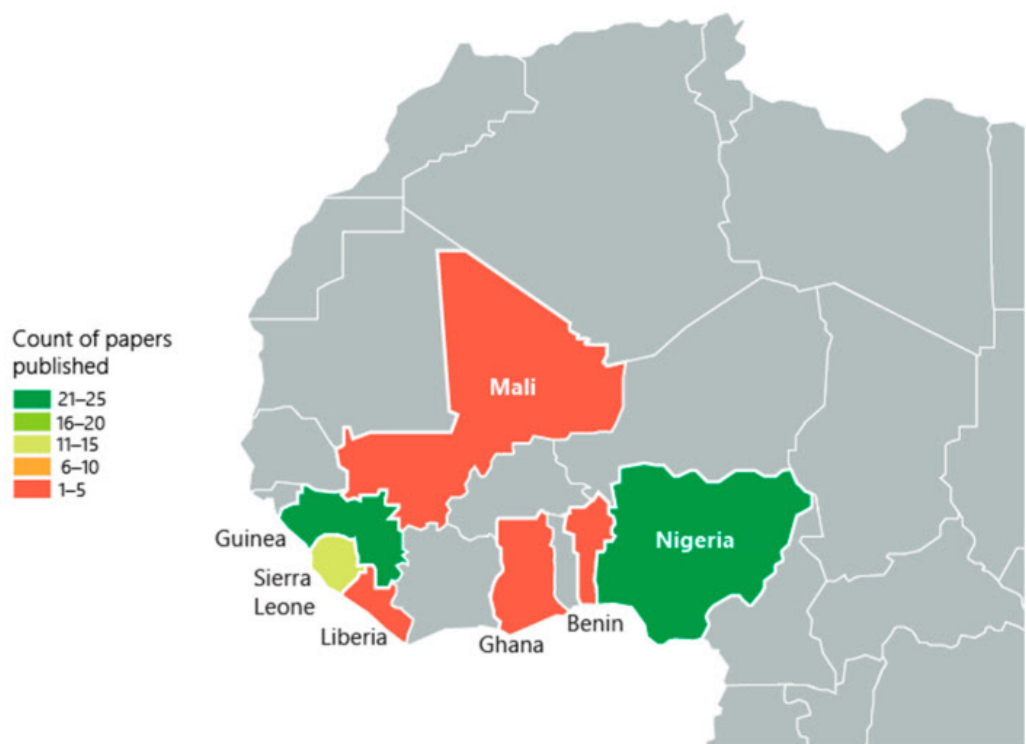


Deciphering the dynamics of Lassa fever outbreak in Edo State, Nigeria: A 3-year study of the epidemiologic patterns, severity profiles, and clinical management

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the LF outbreak in Edo State from January 2021 to November 2023, covering its distribution and geographical patterns, severity, case outcomes, health-seeking behavior, and diagnostic management.

The highest number of cases was recorded in epi-weeks 11, 8, and 4 in 2021, 2022, and 2023, respectively, coinciding with the dry season (November to April), which is known for high LF infection rates. The findings highlight the need for increased health care preparedness against LF during the dry season.

Environmental Drivers and Changing Ecology:

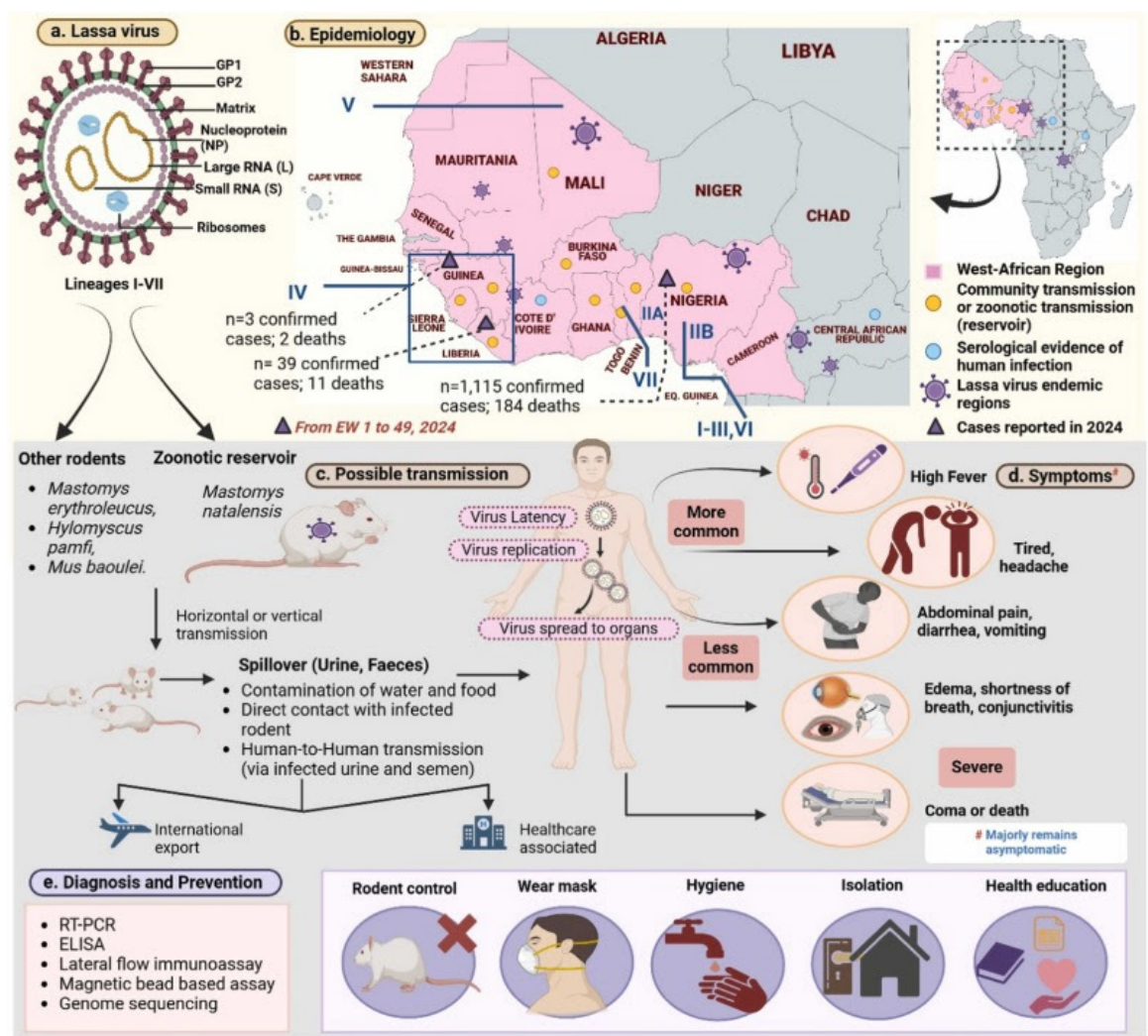


Assessing the environmental drivers of Lassa Fever in West Africa: A systematic review:

This systematic review provides a comprehensive overview of the environmental drivers of LASV in West Africa. Climate models predict an expansion of suitable environmental conditions for *M.Natalensis* due to rising temperatures and increased precipitation, while rapid population growth in West Africa is influencing the conversion of natural habitats to agricultural lands and threatening to expand the ecological niche of LASV host reservoirs.

The mechanisms by which seasonal precipitation, land-use change, and host dynamics drive human LASV epidemics in West Africa are not fully understood, highlighting a need for further research to guide future public health efforts and targeted research. Ultimately, this review underscores the urgent need for interdisciplinary research and proactive preventative strategies to mitigate the impacts of environmental change on LASV transmission and protect vulnerable populations in West Africa.

Regional Spread and Global Health Context



Lassa fever outbreak in West Africa: Rising regional cases with global implications

The study highlights the increasing spread of Lassa fever in West Africa, notably with outbreaks in Guinea, Nigeria, and Liberia. It underscores the zoonotic nature of the disease, challenges in diagnosis due to genetic diversity, and limited treatment options.

The article calls for improved diagnostics, expanded surveillance, and accelerated vaccine development, including new mRNA and recombinant approaches. It also stresses the need for global cooperation and investment to address Lassa fever as a significant public health threat.

Vaccine Development and Strategic Leadership:

How new vaccine trials in West Africa boost global viral defences

Showcases the importance of conducting trials locally to ensure efficacy and build community trust, while contributing critical data to global vaccine development pipelines



Senegal helps to power Africa's drive for vaccine independence

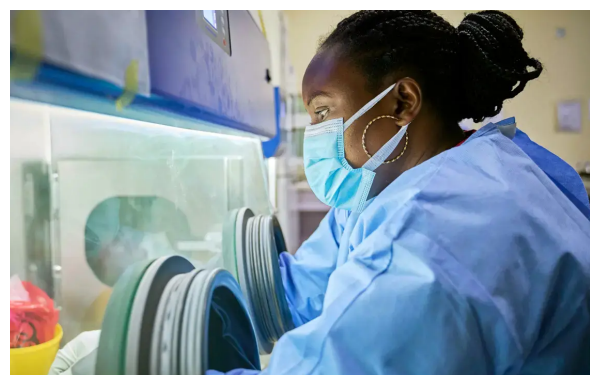
Discusses Senegal's pivotal role in establishing vaccine manufacturing capability—crucial for responding to outbreaks and reducing dependency on external suppliers.



Public Awareness and Cultural Perspectives:

Lassa Fever: Do you have the superhero gene or the betrayal gene?

An engaging oped on genetic susceptibility and the balance between individual immunity and community risk.



The silent threat you shouldn't ignore

A compelling piece raising awareness about underreported and misunderstood viral threats like Lassa fever, calling on policymakers and the public to pay attention before outbreaks worsen.

OPPORTUNITIES AND EVENTS

Opportunities, Grants and RFPs:

Lassa Fever Clinical Management Fellowship:

Georgetown University Center for Global Health Practice and Impact (GU-CGHPI), together with the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC) and in collaboration and the Fellowship Foundational members-Federal Ministry of Health & Social Welfare (FMOH&SW), Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC), the Institute of Viral Haemorrhagic Fevers and Emergent Pathogens Control & Research, Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital (IVEPCR-ISTH), Irrua, Edo State, Federal Medical Centre Owo, Ondo State, and Alex Ekwueme Federal University Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State invites all interested participants to register for the 2nd Cohort training for the Lassa Fever Clinical Management Fellowship (LFCMF).



Learn more and register here:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=Twz368rhGUqGUnT9aNO01VfmD9DKIT5GhQD0heHlhMNURUhRWjVWTVpJVDlRVUNSRkZRUTZUQUFTNC4u&origin=QRCode>

B. Vaccine Development and Manufacturing:

CEPI’s Innovations to Prepare for Future Epidemics and Pandemics Call for Proposals aims to support CEPI’s mission by advancing a broad range of vaccine innovations for pathogens with epidemic or pandemic potential, including novel pathogens capable of infecting and causing disease in humans (i.e., Disease X).

Apply here:
<https://cepi.net/calls-for-proposals?selectedProposal=9bde4615-b7b1-5f00-a079-a3080e88a845&selectedProposal=9bde4615-b7b1-5f00-a079-a3080e88a845>

C. Innovative analytical technologies to improve vaccine manufacturing speed and equitable access:

CEPI has announced a funding opportunity to develop innovative analytical technologies for vaccines. The goal is to reduce vaccine development, manufacturing, and release times (e.g., within 100 days of an outbreak being identified), lower costs, improve equitable deployment in Low to Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), and enhance analytical insights for vaccines such as RNA, viral vectors, or protein-based vaccines.

Apply here:
<https://cepi.net/calls-for-proposals?selectedProposal=970f6a4c-f3af-5da5-ab8c-52d490d37771>

Global and Regional Health Events

Lassa Fever International Conference:



Please save the new dates for the 2nd ECOWAS Lassa Fever International Conference, now confirmed for September 8–12, 2025 in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. Under the conference theme, “Beyond Borders: Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Combat Lassa Fever and Emerging Infectious Diseases,” participants will gather to advance sustainable preparedness, enhance regional coordination, build research and development capacity, improve outbreak management systems, and deepen multisectoral collaboration.

We encourage you to register soon at <https://www.lassafeverinternationalconference.org> and to watch for further details on the programme and registration deadlines on the website and on our social media pages.

FEEDBACK AND COMMENT SECTION

We would love to have your feedback. Please fill out the form below:

<https://forms.gle/rifeNnqELdsGfGjD9>