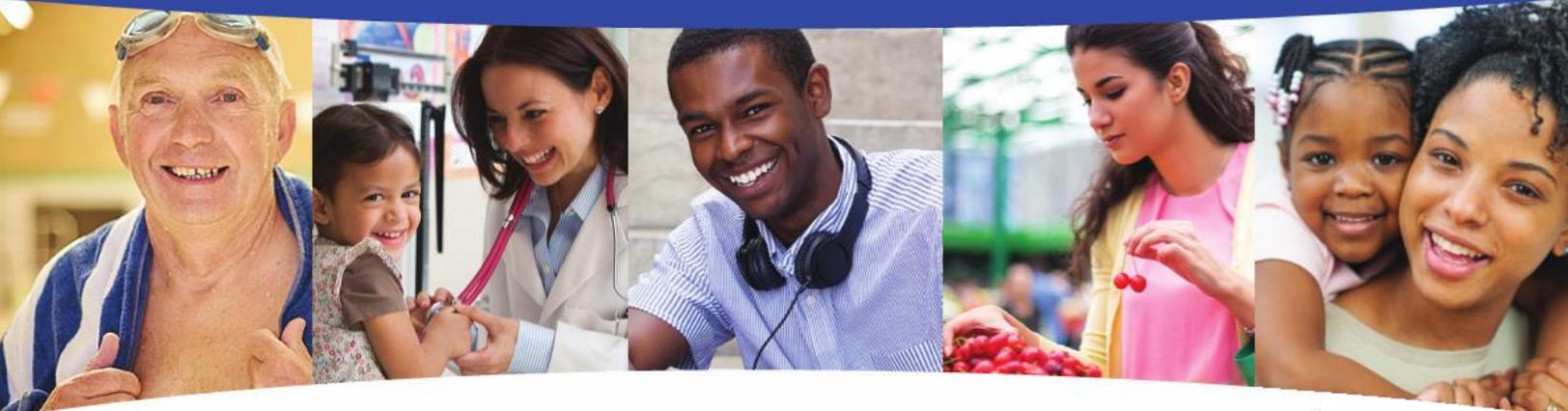


# Lassa Fever Fact Sheet

Toledo-Lucas County Health Department | Emergency Preparedness



## What is Lassa fever?

Lassa fever is a type of viral hemorrhagic fever and is an acute viral illness that occurs in West Africa. The virus, a member of the virus family *Arenaviridae*, is a single-stranded RNA virus and is zoonotic, or animal-borne. Lassa fever is mainly found in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Nigeria and is spread by rats. Other neighboring countries are also at risk because the type of rat that spreads the virus is found throughout the West Africa region.

## How is Lassa fever transmitted?

The reservoir, or host, of Lassa virus is a rodent known as the “multimammate rat”. Once the rat is infected, it is able to excrete the virus in urine for an extended period of time or even the rest of its life. The rodents breed frequently and produce large numbers of offspring. In addition, they colonize in human homes and areas where food is often stored.



Transmission of Lassa virus to humans occurs most commonly through ingestion or inhalation. The rodents shed the virus in urine and droppings and direct contact with these materials, through touching soiled objects, eating contaminated food, or exposure to open cuts or sores, can lead to

infection. Person-to-person transmission may occur after exposure to the virus in the blood, tissue, secretions, or excretions of a Lassa virus-infected individual.

## What are signs and symptoms of Lassa virus?

Signs and symptoms of Lassa fever typically occur 1-3 weeks after the patient comes into contact with the virus. For the majority of Lassa fever virus infections, symptoms are mild and undiagnosed. Mild symptoms include slight fever, general malaise and weakness, and headache. In 20% of infected individuals, the disease may progress to more serious symptoms including hemorrhaging (in gums, eyes, or nose), respiratory distress, repeated vomiting, facial swelling, pain in the chest, back, and abdomen, and shock. Neurological problems have also been described, including hearing loss, tremors, and encephalitis. Death may occur within two weeks after symptom onset due to multi-organ failure.



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## How is Lassa fever diagnosed?

Lassa fever is most often diagnosed by using enzyme-like immunosorbent serologic assays (ELISA), which detect IgM and IgG antibodies as well as Lassa antigen. The virus itself may be cultured in 7 to 10 days.

## What is the treatment for Lassa fever?

Ribavirin, an antiviral drug, has been used with success in Lassa fever patients. It has been shown to be most effective when given early in the course of the illness. Patients should also receive supportive care consisting of maintenance of appropriate fluid and electrolyte balance, oxygenation and blood pressure, as well as treatment for any other complicating infections.

## For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  
<https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/lassa/index.html>

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*The Toledo-Lucas County Health Department is committed to providing relevant and timely information during a public health emergency.*

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