

Current major event

Suspected Plague Outbreak in Libya

On 14 June 2009, the Ministry of Health in Libya reported to WHO/EMRO a cluster of 5 suspected cases of plague (4 bubonic cases and 1 fatal septicemic case). The cases were all from Eltarsha area, 30 km south of Tobruk City. The first 3 cases were from the same family and were admitted to the hospital on 9 June 2009, two days after handling dead rats found near their home. Laboratory confirmation is still pending. At the request of the MOH, a WHO mission carried out a risk assessment in the area from 17-21 June 2009.

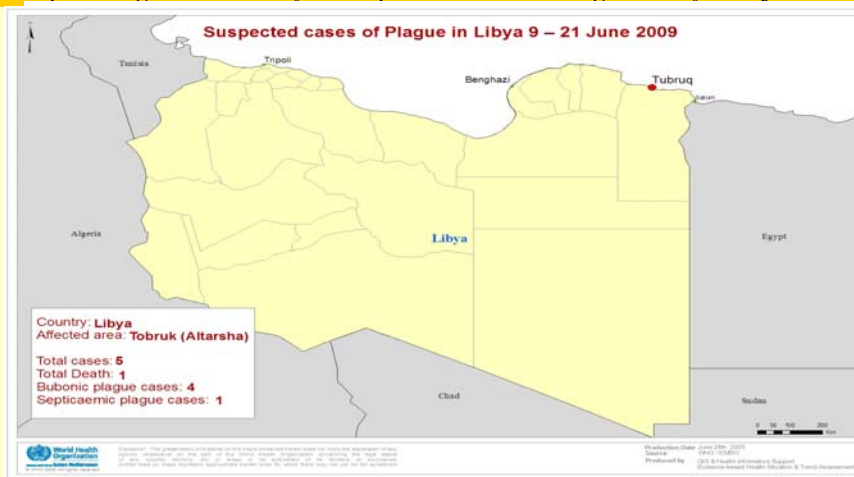
Response efforts by the Ministry included enhanced surveillance, case management, vector control and health education.

Editorial note

The Eltarash area of Tobruk where the cluster of 5 suspected cases of plague was reported is a well known focus for the disease in Libya. The Libyan authorities promptly notified the event to WHO and managed the situation in total transparency in accordance and full compliance with the International Health Regulations. Outbreaks of plague have been reported from neighboring Algeria in the recent past. It is also known that the risk of plague is shared by the countries of the Maghreb. In this regard, it is advisable that the affected countries get together and agree on a common control strategy to minimize and eliminate this recurrent threat from the area.

Before the entry into force of the International Health Regulation (IHR 2005) on June 15 2007, plague was one of the only three diseases that countries were mandated to report to WHO. The others were cholera and yellow fever. Plague is caused by a bacterium called *Yersinia pestis*, and it is transmitted from rodent to rodent by infected fleas. The disease

Map showing area affected by the suspected outbreak of Plague in Libya 6-21 June 2009



Recorded Plague Pandemics in the last 2 millennium

| Year | Affected Continents | Cases | Estimated Deaths |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 542 - 546 | Asia, Africa & Europe | Un-known | 100,000 |
| 1347 - 1350 (Black Death) | Asia, Africa & Europe | Un-known | 50M |
| 1894 - 1903 | Asia, Africa, Europe, N. America, S. America and Australia | Un-known | 13M (India alone) |

| Cases and deaths from plague notified to WHO: | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|
| 1954 - 1997 | 38 countries | 80,613 | 6,587 |

is characterized by periodic outbreaks in rodent populations, resulting to a high death rate. During these outbreaks, hungry infected fleas that have lost their normal hosts seek other sources of blood, thus increasing the risk to humans and other animals frequenting the area.

Epidemics of plague in humans usually involve house rats and their fleas. Rat-borne epidemics continue to occur in some developing countries, particularly in rural areas. Between outbreaks, the plague bacterium is believed to circulate within populations of certain species of rodents without causing excessive mortality. Such groups of infected animals serve as silent, long-term reservoirs of infection. (Sources: WHO & CDC)

Update on outbreaks

Bubonic Plague in Libya; **Human Avian Influenza** in Egypt; **New Influenza A (H1N1) virus infection** in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen.

Current public health events of international concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Avian influenza A/H5N1

| | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Egypt | [81 (27), 33.3%] |
| Indonesia | [141 (115), 81.6%] |
| China | [38 (25), 65.8%] |
| Vietnam | [111(56), 50.5%] |
| Global total | 436 (262), 60.1% |

Influenza A(H1N1)

| | |
|--------|------------------------------|
| Global | [59,814 (263), 0.4%] |
| EMR | [270 (0), 0%] |

Bubonic Plague

| | |
|-------|---------------------|
| Libya | [5(1), 20%] |
|-------|---------------------|

Dengue fever

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Saudi Arabia | [744 (0), 0%] |
|--------------|-----------------------|

(*=Suspected)

CFR=Case-Fatality Rate

? = No data

= Risk assessment ongoing. Of these suspected cases, 8 deaths were reported.