

Licking Lassa Fever

Saving Lives

'The premature mass deaths of the poorest of the poor are absolutely unnecessary, absolutely avoidable.'

Jeffrey D. Sachs, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, UN.

Our Goal

To decrease the morbidity and mortality from Lassa Fever and other communicable diseases in Sierra Leone, and thus decrease the numbers of orphans and bereaved families.

Supported by: The Soroptimist International clubs of South Wales & SI Freetown in Sierra Leone.

Partnered by: WHO, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, including the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society.

Our role would be: To raise funds to support work on the ground and to keep a watching brief on the progress of the programme.

Scope of the problem: Communicable diseases kill millions of people each year - leaving children without parents and parents without children. Conflict forces people into overcrowded camps and public buildings and the spread of communicable diseases is facilitated. The conflicts in Sierra Leone have added to the problems of poverty and lack of accessible health care which lead to low life expectancy and high death rates (see table below). Sierra Leone is at the bottom of the UNDP development table at 177 out of 177 countries.

Indicator	Sierra Leone	UK
GNI per capita (US\$), 2006	240	40180
Life expectancy at birth (years), 2006	42	79
Infant mortality rate (under 1), 2006	159	5
Under-5 mortality rate, 2006	270	6
Maternal mortality ratio, 2005	2100	8
Lifetime risk of maternal death	1:8	1:8200

What is Lassa Fever and where is it found?

Lassa Fever is a viral disease which can lead to uncontrolled bleeding and death whilst survivors and their families are ostracised. It is prevalent in west and central Africa. Rural, not urban, areas are affected through contamination of food and water with the body fluids of rats, eating rat meat, through sexual intercourse and contact with the body fluids of infected people.

- In an outbreak in Kenema, Sierra Leone, during December 2003 - April 2004:
 - 32% of patients admitted to hospital were under five years of age and 48% under 15 years of age;
 - The overall case fatality rate was 30% **BUT** 50% of children under five and 71% of children under one year of age died.
- Other studies confirm that Lassa Fever has a higher death rate in some groups than others:
 - 20% of cases admitted to hospital **BUT** 31% for those aged less than 18 years compared with 14% for those aged more than 18 years;
 - 30% of pregnant women and 90% of fetuses.
- In addition 29% of people affected become deaf - with all that means for people without access to appropriate help and unsympathetic attitudes amongst their families and friends.

The similarity of Lassa Fever at presentation to the more commonly known fevers (e.g. acute respiratory infections, gastroenteritis, malaria) conspires to hide the true extent of this disease. Many of the solutions, such as clean water, good sanitation, and a healthy diet, help to decrease the prevalence of all of them.

What Soroptimist International of South Wales can do to help:

With our partners:

- Develop and implement effective community outreach programmes which address clean water supply, effective sanitation, effective food production and storage, healthy diets in local communities and use of condoms;
- Increase the knowledge and awareness of local communities regarding Lassa Fever and other communicable diseases in order to increase earlier presentation of clinical cases and to decrease the social isolation experienced by people who contract the disease, and of their families;
- Decrease the incidence/prevalence and mortality rates of Lassa Fever, acute diarrhoeal diseases, malaria and malnutrition in programme areas.

This will be demonstrated through:

- Increasing the number and distribution of safe food and water storage facilities, potable water supplies and latrines;
- Lowering the infant mortality rate, the under fives mortality rate and the maternal mortality ratio;
- Decreasing the incidence/prevalence and mortality rates of Lassa Fever and other communicable diseases.

Based on the costs of a Lassa Fever Programme run by Merlin in 2004 and current estimates from the SLRCS, the estimated costs for covering a region (75 villages) in Sierra Leone, for 2 years, would be £180,000.

The government of Sierra Leone signed an accord, at a conference organised by WHO in September 2004 with participation from our partners, agreeing to tackle Lassa Fever. This is consistent with the Millennium Development Goals and the strategies of our partners, who have extensive experience of Lassa Fever.

**We can make a differenceThrough helping to combat Lassa Fever, SI can have a marked influence on lessening
*The premature mass deaths of the poorest of the poor which are absolutely unnecessary, absolutely avoidable.***

Please support this project

Thank-you