

BEYOND OUR BORDERS

The 'Beyond our Borders' column focuses on selected and current international diseases that may affect South Africans travelling abroad. Numbers correspond to Figure 3 on page 10.

Yellow fever: Nigeria

Nigeria is responding to the latest successive yearly outbreak of yellow fever since the return of the disease in September 2017. Since the beginning of 2020, a total of 1 558 suspected cases and 46 confirmed cases has been reported from 481 (62%) local government areas (LGAs) across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

On Monday 16 November 2020, three more LGAs in the state of Enugu were suspected to have recorded yellow fever outbreaks. Enugu had already documented an outbreak in two communities where yellow fever had reportedly claimed 52 lives between the first reports of the outbreak in October 2020 and 16 November 2020. Yellow fever has also been confirmed in Nigeria's Benue State, where epidemiologists reported that 26 people had fallen ill. State government alerted that it had received reports of 'strange deaths within communities' in three other local government agencies. In response to this, the ministry of health has initiated a rapid response team which is working in collaboration with international and national

partners to visit these communities and take samples for testing. These specimens will be sent to the national reference laboratory in the country's capital city, Abuja.

Following the initial rise in laboratory confirmed cases, a large scale vaccination campaign was launched with an anticipated 922 463 residents of Enugu State set to be vaccinated. This number represents 85% of the entire population in the affected local councils. Vaccinations will take place in primary health centres, special outreach centres, as well as house-to-house vaccination using fully trained and mobilised vaccinators. This vaccination strategy will target individuals between the ages of 9 months and 44 years of age. Initially, the programme aims to cover affected local councils and then later, extended to ten neighbouring councils and then the state. Officials believe that their robust public health response involving public education, extensive vaccination and rapid testing and management will result in timeous control of the outbreak.

Leptospirosis: India

Leptospirosis cases have been on the rise with a total of 203 cases reported between January and October this year. In January 2020, 559 people were tested, 24 of whom were symptomatic. Twenty-six people were infected in February, a further 23 in March, five in May, 11 in June and 25 in August. The highest number of cases were reported in September 2020 with a total of 34 cases. It is important to note that fewer cases have been reported in 2020 than in 2019 (344 cases) and in 2018 (330 cases). The infection normally spreads through the urine of rats. Dogs, pigs and cattle can also shed leptospira in their urine.

Usually farmers who visit the fields for harvesting paddy crops get infected. It is thought that the decline in reported cases during 2020 may be, in part, as a result of the prolonged four-month lockdown and consequent decline in people farming or going out. Moreover, the healthcare workers who visited houses to create awareness about coronavirus also used the opportunity to educate about dengue fever and leptospirosis, highlighting some of the precautionary measures that can be taken to prevent these diseases.

Plague: Democratic Republic of the Congo

A new outbreak of suspected bubonic plague was reported on 29 October 2020 from the Aungba health zone located in the Mahagi territory, Ituri Province, in north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The area is located in the most active endemic plague focus in continental Africa and is the 8th plague outbreak reported in less than a year from this area in the DRC.

Initial reports came from a nurse on 29 October who alerted the Chief Medical Officer in the region of four community deaths. The following day, the supervision team in the Aungba health zone began their outbreak investigation and recorded a total of seven cases of bubonic plague, including four deaths.

The index cases appear to have been two boys, aged 10 and 13 years, from the same family. They presented with symptoms classic of the disease and consequently both died between 26 and 27 October. The other two recorded deaths are of two girls, aged 13 and 14 years, also belonging to one family and residing in a household close to the index cases. The remaining three active cases were sourced in the area by the outbreak investigation team and are currently being treated at nearby health centres. Public health measures has also extended to trace 26 contacts who were preventatively managed with doxycycline. Furthermore, the houses where the deaths occurred were dusted with deltamethrin to control potentially infected fleas.

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Salmonellosis: Canada

Lambton Public Health has now reported that dozens of people have contracted salmonella infections after eating at the Barakat restaurant in Sarnia and at the Barakat food truck in Corunna, Ontario, Canada, between 19 and 29 October 2020. On Monday 9 November 2020, the local health unit confirmed that a total of 41 people has been diagnosed with salmonellosis. The first news release was made on 30 October 2020, alerting the public that an investigation was being conducted. By 5 November 2020, 33 cases related to the outbreak had been identified in people aged between 9 months and 73 years. Majority of these exposures occurred between 21 and 25 October 2020.

Awareness of the outbreak is increasing and the public has been encouraged to report illness to the Lambton Public Health as well as to contact healthcare providers if symptomatic. In earlier news releases, public health reported that food and environmental swabs from the location had shown that food samples were negative, although results for some of these samples remain pending. The investigation is still ongoing and restaurant owners continue to remain cooperative, with their facilities remaining closed whilst pending an outcome.



Figure 3. Current outbreaks/events that may have implications for travellers. Numbers correspond to text above. The red dot is the approximate location of the outbreak or event.