Awareness of Lassa Fever Virus Disease Survey

\*Ifeanyi Nsofor, Ugonna Ofonagoro, \*\*Bell Ihua, \*ABUJA EpiAFRIC, \*\* NOI Polls

Lassa fever is a viral haemorrhagic fever cause by the Lassa virus. In 2018, Nigeria witnessed a large Lassa fever outbreak. Consequently, EpiAFRIC in partnership with NOI Polls conducted another survey to assess Nigerians’ awareness about modes of transmission, symptoms and prevention of Lassa fever. The same questionnaire was used for both the 2016 and 2018 surveys.

Aims and Objectives

The objective was to compare results from both surveys to determine how Nigerians’ Lassa fever awareness changed between 2016 and 2018.

Methods

The survey involved telephone interviews of a random nationwide sample. One thousand randomly selected phone-owning Nigerians aged 18 years and above, representing the six geopolitical zones in the country, were interviewed.

Key findings

Awareness of Lassa fever virus disease dropped slightly from 81% in 2018 to 80% in 2018. Across geo-political zones, the North-Central zone accounted for the highest percentage of respondents (88%) who are aware of the outbreak of the disease compared to 89% in North-East zone in 2016. ‘Radio’ (40%) topped the list of sources of awareness and ‘television’ was second (39%). In comparison, the 2016 survey results indicated that ‘television’ (46%) came tops. There is an 8% increase of residents who believe that keeping their environment clean would prevent being infected by Lassa Fever virus. At 35%, there was no change in respondents who said that ‘they will ensure all foods are covered and properly stored’. At 14%, there is a 10% drop - down from 24% - in respondents who said they would prevent the disease by ‘getting rid of rats in their environment’. Sixty-six percent of respondents stated that ‘fever’ is one of the symptoms of the disease. This shows a 3% increase from the 2016 report result of 63%. There is no change in the percentage of respondents who are willing to seek medical assistance (92%).

Main Conclusions

Results from the 2016 and 2018 surveys indicate that awareness of Lassa Fever, as well as awareness of modes of transmission and what to do to prevent the disease is high. Unfortunately, this does not seem to translate to behavioural change. Food are still dried in the open and people still exhibit poor attitudes to refuse disposal. Health workers must observe the strictest standards of infection prevention and control protocols in handling patients that are suspected. They must adopt the test and treat practice especially for malaria.