

Niger lead poisoning kills 28 kids

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At least 28 children all aged less than five, have died in an outbreak of lead poisoning in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State, federal ministry of health confirmed yesterday.

Minister of state for health, Fidelis Nwankwo said 17 girls and 11 boys are among 65 children

who were taken ill across two wards of Magiro and Kawo in Shikira village.

All the dead and those affected had lead concentrations nearly 22 times higher than accepted safety limits established by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Officials in Niger State reported the outbreak to the federal health ministry on May 7, prompting a scoping mission by a team from the twin ministries of

health as well as mines and steel development.

The team was said to have found serious impact on livestock with cows, goats and chickens most affected with concerns about possible impact on neighbouring Kaduna State.

The outbreak has been blamed on illegal mining in unapproved sites in Rafi after families mining exhausted deposits in current locations.

Head of port health services, Dr Nasir Sani-Gwarzo, who led the scoping team to Niger said: "Within the vicinity of these villages, there are so many gold deposits that have been mined for several years, nothing happened. But now they have exhausted those fields and moved over to another larger field, and that is where they are digging this particular rock that has much higher lead in it."

The federal health ministry has

said the current outbreak is more serious than the famous Zamfara lead poisoning-which killed hundreds of children-because the lead ore implicated in the Niger incident is more poisonous killing off animals and also children.

Director-general of Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, Dr Abdulsalam Nasidi said the Niger sites have more lead than those of Zamfara, hence the need to act urgently.



'My-family asked me to ride from Kaduna to Abuja for Buhari'