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Lead poisoning kills 27 children in Niger State

MAY 14, 2015 : FRIDAY OLOKOR • 0 COMMENTS

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The Federal Government has confirmed the death of 27 children in a fresh outbreak of lead poisoning from illegal mining in Niger State.

The Minister of State for Health, Fidelis Nwankwo, stated this during a press briefing on Wednesday in Abuja. He said 63 cases of the outbreak had been confirmed by the government in the state while many animals in affected communities had died.

He said there is palpable fear among neighbouring communities in Kaduna State. However, he said the disease is not contagious.

The communities affected are Shikira, Magiro Ward and Kawo, all in Rafi Local Government, according to the Director of Port Health in the ministry, Dr. Nasir Sani-Gwarzo, who led the Federal Government's team to the areas.

Gwarzo emphasized that the outbreak was deadlier than the one which broke out in Zamfara in 2011, in which 400 people were killed.

According to him, the public should not have excessive fear over the outbreak but should instead take all precautionary measures against its spread.

On his part, Nwankwo said the Ministry of Health received report of the outbreak on May 7 and immediately swung into action.

He said, "The lead poisoning was confirmed and it is confirmed that most of the people affected are children below the age of five years. The affected children were found to have high serum lead levels of between 171.5 – 224ug Pb/dl (normal is less than 10ug Pb/dl). That means, 17-22 times higher than the acceptable limits, as established by the World Health Organization.

"The rapid assessment by the NCDC/FMOH/MMSD revealed that as at May 12, 2015, 65 cases and 27 deaths had occurred, giving a case fatality rate of 43 percent. All the 27 cases were children below the age of five made up of 17 females and 11 males.

"Additionally, the finding revealed a serious impact on our livestock with cows, goats and chickens most affected. The devastating impact of this outbreak is associated with new mining sites which were found to contain more leaded ores which are often brought home for crushing and processing."

He listed efforts made by the government to include advocacy meeting with community leaders in the state, including sensitization of communities in the state.

Nwankwo explained further that the government had commenced the process of establishing incident

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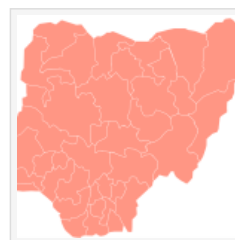
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command structure to enhance routine coordination of the outbreak response.

Besides, the minister said government was already mobilizing health facilities in Nigeria and Zamfara State to commence action.

He ordered that all laws affecting mining in the country should be respected while illegal mining should stop in the state.

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