

FEATURED

Confusion as strange illness allegedly kills 70 in Kwara community

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Kwara '... strange illness.

They told our one of our correspondents that the illness was predominant among the Fulani settlers called the *Bororos* in the community.

It was gathered that a large number of the *Bororos* had died since the outbreak of the strange illness on July 23, 2017.

Those who spoke with *The PUNCH* include the Oloro of Oro-Ago, Oba Tafa Dada; the President, Oro-Ago Development Union, Olaniyi Olushosa; a community member, who identified himself simply as Taiwo; and another concerned person, identified as Stephen.

According to them, those affected by the illness would first vomit blood and some black substances.

They said families had been devastated and called on government to come to their aid.

Olushosa said death toll as a result of the strange illness had hit 70 in two weeks.

He added that he had reported the matter to the state Ministry of Health in Ilorin, through a doctor that he identified simply as Dr. Lawal.

He said, “It is worrisome that the Oro-Ago General Hospital had been abandoned and left dilapidated. No health workers, nothing; right now, our community lacks health centres.

The ODU President called on the Kwara State Government as well as other relevant bodies, to visit the community and stop the harvest of death.

He said, “Death toll has reached about 70 in two weeks. Those affected are mostly the Fulani people. The matter has been reported to the Ministry of Health.

Oba Dada also confirmed the outbreak of the strange illness. He said he sent Olushosa to report the sad development to the Ministry of Health in Ilorin.

He said, “It is true that a strange illness has hit some members of Oro-Ago.

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the ministry of health.”

A resident, Taiwo, said the strange illness started on July 23. He claimed that no fewer than 120 people had died. He said about five persons died on Thursday on the way to the General Hospital, Omu-Oran.

He explained that 74 people died in Michede, in Oro-Ago, between July 23 and Thursday. He added that 36 people died at Gaa Wakil along Oreke Road, Oro-Ago, between Sunday, August 6 and Thursday.

According to him, 14 people died at Orisa via Ahun in Oro. He also said that four people died on Wednesday, while five died on Thursday.

He said, “Since July 23, we have been experiencing a strange disease around the Oro-Ago area. About 120 people have died.

“The symptoms are usually intermittent headaches and serious stomach pain. If it starts, between one hour and one hour thirty minutes, they would start vomiting blood. Those who were unable to vomit blood will die within six hours. But those who vomited blood would stay for about three days before they die.

“We have called the attention of the state Ministry of Health. We have not seen anybody.”

Stephen also said many people had died in the community.

But the Kwara State Commissioner for Health, Alhaji Suliaman Aloge, said there was no strange illness in the area.

He said people were making unnecessary claims because they wanted a functional health centre in the area.

He, however, said he got a report that a woman died on Tuesday of cancer.

Aloge said “The Public Health Department through the Epidemiological Unit has

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in Oro- centre in Oro-Ago was transferred and has not been replaced. I have directed relevant units to move another nurse to the health centre.

“I was informed that only one woman died on Tuesday. She died of a confirmed case of cancer. There is nothing like outbreak of illness in that community.”

However, doctors and experts who spoke to our correspondents on Thursday said the symptoms described by the victims were suggestive of a viral haemorrhagic disease.

A surgeon, Dr Adekunle Ashimi, said the symptoms could be indicative of Lassa fever.

Ashimi said, “I know that there was or is a cholera outbreak, but the symptoms described here do not fit cholera. It appears they have another viral haemorrhagic disease from the family of Ebola and Lassa. But samples need to be collected and analysed to get a conclusive diagnosis.”

Corroborating his colleague’s view, a medical practitioner, Dr Adeoye Oyewole, said it could either be a situation aggravated by local poisoning or Lassa fever.

Adeoye said, “I would say a high index for Lassa infection. Also, considering the population and the mortality figure, it could be poisoning. Let’s not forget that Lassa itself is poisoning of food by rat faeces and urine. There is a local factor in that place that is poisoning their collective food or water intake. A lot of analyses are required.”

The Director, Institute for Molecular Science and Biotechnology, University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Dr Ayokunle Afolabi-Toye, said a blood toxicological screening would yield some insight into an accurate diagnosis of the disease.

He noted that epidemiologists and relevant health authorities in the state needed to confirm the deaths

Afolabi-Toye said, “I would first explore the possibility of chemical poisons in the community. Not enough symptoms are reported and the sequence and timing of appearance of symptoms is not indicated either. But blood toxicological screening will yield some insights.”

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