



WEST AFRICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
ORGANISATION OUEST AFRICAINE DE LA SANTE  
ORGANIZAÇÃO OESTE AFRICANA DA SAÚDE

PRESS RELEASE

10 December, 2024.

West African Health Organization (WAHO) Hosts Inaugural Webinar on Research and Development Lassa Fever Series

**CEDEAO**  
**WAHO**  
**ECOWAS**

## ECOWAS Research and Development Lassa Fever Series

### NEW KNOWLEDGE FRONTIERS FOR LASSA FEVER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE IN WEST AFRICA: EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD

**SPEAKERS**

OPENING REMARKS      INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION      CLOSING REMARKS

  
**Dr. Melchior Athanase Joël C. AISSI**  
Director General West African Health Organization (WAHO)

  
**Prof William Ampofo**  
Chief Executive Officer, National Vaccine Institute, Ghana.

  
**Vivianne Ihekweazu**  
Managing Director, Nigeria Health Watch

**PANELISTS**

  
**Dr. Kamji Jan**  
Country Project Manager, CEPI Enable Project, Nigeria

  
**Prof Alhaji N'Jai**  
Researcher at University of Sierra Leone

  
**Dr Minnie Sankawulo-Ricks**  
Medical Director/CEO, Phebe Hospital & School of Nursing, Republic of Liberia

**MODERATOR**

  
**Dr Kemisola Agbaoye**  
Director of Programmes, Nigeria Health Watch

**DATE**  
Tuesday, 10th December 2024

**TIME**  
9:00 GMT / 10:00 WAT

**REGISTER HERE**  
<https://nhwat.ch/waholassaseries1>



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10 December, 2024.

The West African Health Organization (WAHO) today successfully convened a high-impact virtual webinar under the theme, “***New Knowledge Frontiers for Lassa Fever Preparedness and Response in West Africa: Evidence from the Field***”. The event brought together over 100 health experts, researchers, policymakers, and frontline workers from across the ECOWAS region to share evidence-based insights and innovations in the fight against Lassa fever.

This initiative, supported by Coalition of Epidemic Preparedness and Innovations (CEPI), Nigeria Health Watch, World Health Organisation, African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and other regional partners, seeks to raise awareness of Lassa fever as a priority health threat in West Africa. The series focuses on advancing research, diagnostics, and community-led solutions to improve preparedness and response strategies against this zoonotic disease.

In his opening remarks from, **Dr. Melchior Athanase Joël C. AÏSSI, Director General of WAHO**, conveyed the warm greetings of **His Excellency, Dr. Alieu Omar TOURAY, President of the ECOWAS Commission**, and expressed his gratitude to the participants for joining the inaugural session. Dr. AÏSSI highlighted that the Lassa fever webinar is not only a platform for knowledge sharing but a call to action for addressing the ongoing challenges posed by this disease. He underscored the importance of collaboration and evidence-based action in tackling Lassa fever. The webinar, he said, has brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, policymakers, researchers, health professionals, and community representatives, who are working together to share ideas, learn from each other, and co-create solutions to address this public health threat. Dr. AÏSSI expressed his gratitude to key partners, including CEPI and Nigeria Health Watch, whose support has been instrumental in making the webinar series possible. He also thanked the speakers and panelists for their dedication and expertise, which are crucial for the region's efforts to tackle Lassa fever.



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**Prof. William Ampofo**, a leading virologist from the University of Ghana, also shared his thoughts on the importance of addressing Lassa fever amidst ongoing infectious disease challenges across Africa. He pointed out that although Lassa fever is not causing frequent outbreaks, the region remains highly vulnerable due to its endemic nature. Prof. Ampofo stressed the need for continued research, particularly the development of vaccines, and mentioned that ongoing technical trials at the University of Ghana were crucial in advancing understanding and preparedness for the virus. He also highlighted the importance of pursuing new vaccine candidates and stressed that the region must remain vigilant and well-prepared for potential outbreaks of Lassa fever and other zoonotic diseases.

A robust panel discussion addressing key aspects of Lassa fever management, including advancements in vaccine research, innovations in diagnostic tools, and community-based interventions followed the presentations, where participants exchanged experiences and proposed actionable recommendations for integrating evidence-based practices into national and regional response strategies.

**Key highlights included:**

- Vaccine Development Progress: Updates on clinical trials and research into multi-target vaccines aimed at addressing the genetic diversity of the Lassa virus.
- Community Engagement: Practical strategies for empowering local communities through education and hygiene practices to reduce transmission.
- Innovative Diagnostics: Deployment of rapid diagnostic tools to enable quicker detection and timely treatment, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

**Challenges and Recommendations**



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Speakers highlighted the challenges of stigma, delayed diagnoses, and inadequate funding as persistent barriers to effective Lassa fever control. They called for coordinated efforts to:

- Expand diagnostic infrastructure in remote areas.
- Support vaccine development and clinical trials.
- Strengthen cross-border surveillance and data sharing.
- Enhance community-led efforts to address the socio-economic determinants of Lassa fever.

### **A Call to Action**

The webinar concluded with a renewed call to prioritize Lassa fever as a critical public health issue. Participants underscored the importance of integrating preparedness and response efforts within broader health system strengthening initiatives.

The event also served as a platform to launch WAHO's new initiative on Lassa fever preparedness, response, research, and vaccine development aimed at supporting ECOWAS Member States in scaling up laboratory capacity, training healthcare workers, and conducting operational research.

As part of WAHO's commitment to regional health security, the organization will continue to facilitate knowledge exchange and drive multi-sectoral collaborations. Subsequent sessions in the Lassa Fever Webinar Series will build on the outcomes of this inaugural meeting, to foster innovative solutions and enhance regional readiness against infectious diseases.

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For further information, please contact:

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### **About WAHO**



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The West African Health Organization (WAHO) is the specialized health agency of ECOWAS, dedicated to achieving the highest possible standards and protecting the health of the people of the West African sub-region. Through collaboration with member states and partners, WAHO works to harmonize policies, pool resources and collectively respond to health challenges in the region.