

Viral Zoonoses in Africa: A Review of their Epidemiology, Socio-Economic Impact and Challenges of Control

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ABSTRACT

Viral zoonoses are a major cause of morbidity and mortality in Africa and more than fifteen zoonotic viruses are known to exist in the African continent. Six of these: rabies, Lassa, Ebola, yellow fever, Rift valley fever and monkey pox viruses are responsible for the majority of deaths and morbidity associated with viral zoonoses in the continent.

Rabies virus remains enzootic in dogs and cats and continues to cause human death in many African countries, predominantly following dog bites, and outbreaks of Ebola and Rift valley fever are reported from time to time in countries of East Africa. The last decade saw major landmarks in the epidemiology of viral zoonotic agents in West Africa which include the emergence of Ebola and the accompanying explosive outbreaks in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, the prolonged and large epidemics of Lassa fever in Nigeria, the resurgence of monkey pox and yellow fever in Nigeria, and the emergence of Rift valley fever in Niger and Mali.

The impact of viral zoonoses on the development of African countries and their economies is enormous. Outbreaks of these diseases have made Africa unattractive as a tourist destination and for investment leading to a reduction in job creation and growth. They also cause losses in livestock and agricultural production and reduction in cross-border trade with neighboring countries as a result of restrictions of movement, goods and services. In order to mitigate impact of these diseases on African countries, priority must be given to the control of their causative agents.

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