Beat: Travel

Yellow fever outbreak in Darfur kills at least 32

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USPA News - A previously unknown disease which has claimed more than 30 lives in Sudan`s troubled Darfur region this month has been identified as yellow fever, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday. Preparations for a mass vaccination campaign are now underway.

The outbreak was first detected early this month when a number of people in the central and southern regions of Darfur became ill and eventually died. Sudanese media said the victims suffered from a number of symptoms, including diarrhea, vomiting, and bleeding from both the mouth and nose. Tarik Jasarevic, a spokesman for the World Health Organization (WHO), on Tuesday said it had been informed by Sudan`s Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) that the outbreak is being caused by yellow fever. Since the first week of October, a total of 84 suspected cases, including 32 deaths, have been reported in the districts of Azoom, Kass, Mershing, Nertiti, Nyala, Wadi Salih and Zalingei. "FMoH said that the immediate priority is to control the vector, reinforcing the disease surveillance system and raising public awareness on the prevention and control of this disease," Jasarevic said. "Preparations for a mass vaccination campaign are underway to vaccinate the at risk population in Darfur." According to Darfur radio station Dabanga, however, at least 37 people are believed to have died as a result of the disease while 125 others have been infected. The radio station quoted a resident as saying that local authorities were slow to react and did not immediately take necessary action to contain the outbreak. "FMoH, WHO, as well as health partners are working on ground to ensure timely containment of the outbreak," Jasarevic added. There is no cure for yellow fever, which is an acute viral haemorrhagic disease transmitted by infected mosquitoes. Treatment is aimed at reducing the symptoms for the comfort of patients, and measures often taken include supportive care to treat dehydration and fever and blood transfusion if needed. "It is a preventable disease with symptoms and severity varying from case to case," Jasarevic explained. "Protective measures like the use of bed nets, insect repellent and long clothing are considered the best methods to contain an outbreak. Vaccination is the single most important measure for preventing yellow fever." It is estimated some 200,000 people are infected by yellow fever each year, killing approximately 30,000 of them. The virus is endemic in tropical areas of Africa and Latin America, which have a combined population of over 900 million people. Up to half of severely affected persons will die from the disease without treatment.

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