

Beat: Health

Bubonic plague in Madagascar kills at least 40, sickens 79

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USPA News - An outbreak of the bubonic plague has killed at least 40 people in Madagascar, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday, warning that the bacterial disease could now spread rapidly after reaching the densely populated capital. The first case was identified on August 31 after a man from the village of Soamahatamana, in Tsiroanomandidy district, fell ill with plague.

He died three days later. A total of 119 laboratory-confirmed cases have been reported up to last Sunday, including 40 people who have died of the disease, the WHO said, citing figures from the country's health ministry. Cases have been reported in 16 districts so far, but there are fears that the outbreak may worsen after two cases were confirmed in the capital Antananarivo. "There is now a risk of a rapid spread of the disease due to the city's high population density and the weakness of the healthcare system," WHO said in a statement. At least two or three of those infected were found to have the contagious pneumonic plague. Plague is a bacterial disease caused by *Yersinia pestis*, which primarily affects wild rodents and is spread by fleas. Humans bitten by an infected flea usually develop a bubonic form of plague, which produces the characteristic swelling of the lymph node. If the bacteria reaches the lungs, the patient will develop pneumonic plague, which is then transmissible from person to person through infected droplets spread by coughing. If diagnosed early, bubonic plague can be successfully treated with antibiotics, but pneumonic plague is one of the world's most deadly infectious diseases, killing some of those infected in as few as 24 hours after infection. But while the mortality rate depends on how soon treatment is started, it is always very high.

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