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Title: Need for Legislative Oversight and Public Health Preparedness Following Confirmed Hantavirus Outbreak Cases Reported by WHO

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Executive Summary

The World Health Organisation has confirmed an outbreak of hantavirus infections linked to cruise ship exposure, with six laboratory-confirmed cases and three deaths recorded as of May 8, 2026. The confirmed cases involve the Andes virus strain, a rare variant known for its documented potential for human-to-human transmission. This development has heightened global public health concerns due to the risks associated with international travel, maritime movement, and cross-border disease transmission.

Hantaviruses are zoonotic pathogens commonly transmitted through exposure to infected rodents or their bodily fluids. In severe cases, infection can result in Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) or Haemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS), both of which are associated with significant mortality rates if not promptly detected and managed.

Although no confirmed case has been reported in Nigeria, the outbreak highlights vulnerabilities linked to increasing global mobility, international travel, maritime activities, and the persistent challenges facing disease surveillance systems across many developing countries. The emergence of a transmissible strain underscores the importance of strengthening national preparedness systems before any potential importation occurs.

The situation raises critical concerns regarding Nigeria's readiness to detect, prevent, and respond to emerging infectious disease threats. Key issues include limited public awareness of zoonotic diseases, potential gaps in health screening and surveillance at airports, seaports, and land borders, weak laboratory and diagnostic preparedness for rare viral infections, and insufficient emergency response coordination among relevant agencies. There is also a risk of misinformation and public panic in the absence of effective communication strategies.

Given the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, proactive legislative oversight is essential to ensure that Nigeria's public health emergency systems remain preventive rather than reactive. Strengthening disease surveillance infrastructure, laboratory capacity, emergency response systems, and inter-agency coordination is critical to national health security.

Accordingly, the National Assembly, through its Committees on Health, Primary Healthcare and Communicable Diseases, Aviation, Maritime Safety, and National Emergency Management, may consider:



- Convening an emergency public health preparedness oversight session involving the Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Port Health Services, Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), and related agencies.
- Reviewing current disease surveillance and screening systems at airports, seaports, and land borders to assess operational readiness for imported infectious diseases.
- Supporting increased funding for infectious disease laboratories, genomic surveillance systems, rapid response units, and emergency diagnostic infrastructure.
- Encouraging coordinated public sensitisation campaigns to improve awareness of emerging zoonotic diseases while preventing misinformation and unnecessary panic.
- Reviewing existing infectious disease preparedness and emergency response frameworks to identify legislative or policy gaps requiring intervention.
- Promoting stronger collaboration among health, immigration, aviation, maritime, and emergency management agencies for coordinated outbreak prevention and response.

Background:

The World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed an outbreak of hantavirus infections linked to a cruise ship exposure, with six laboratory-confirmed cases and three reported deaths out of eight suspected cases as of May 8, 2026. According to the WHO, all confirmed infections were identified as the Andes virus strain, a variant known for its rare but documented capability of human-to-human transmission¹.

Hantaviruses are zoonotic pathogens typically transmitted through contact with infected rodents, their urine, droppings, or saliva. In severe cases, the virus can lead to Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) or Haemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS), both of which can have high fatality rates if not detected and managed early.

The confirmation of a transmissible strain has raised global public health concerns due to the potential risks associated with international travel, port entry systems, cross-border disease surveillance, and emergency preparedness mechanisms.

Although no confirmed case has been reported in Nigeria at this time, increasing global mobility, international travel, maritime activities, and weak disease surveillance systems across parts of Africa highlight the need for proactive preparedness and legislative oversight to prevent possible importation and public panic.

¹ Vanguard (2026, May 8). WHO says six hantavirus cases confirmed so far.
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/who-says-six-hantavirus-cases-confirmed-so-far/>

**Issue:**

The emergence of confirmed hantavirus cases involving a human-transmissible strain presents potential public health, border surveillance, and emergency preparedness concerns for Nigeria.

Key concerns include:

- Limited public awareness and preparedness regarding emerging zoonotic diseases
- Potential gaps in disease surveillance at airports, seaports, and border entry points
- Weak laboratory preparedness and diagnostic capacity for rare viral outbreaks
- Insufficient emergency response coordination for imported infectious diseases
- Risks of misinformation, panic, and poor public communication during emerging disease threats
- Need for stronger inter-agency coordination between health, aviation, maritime, and border control authorities

Given Nigeria's population size and international travel exposure, delayed preparedness could increase vulnerability to future outbreaks or imported cases.

Rationale for Legislative Actions:

Emerging infectious diseases remain a significant national security and public health concern. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the severe economic, social, and healthcare consequences of delayed preparedness and weak surveillance systems.

Legislative oversight is necessary to ensure that:

- Nigeria's public health emergency systems remain proactive rather than reactive.
- Border health surveillance systems are strengthened at airports, seaports, and land borders
- Disease detection laboratories and emergency response structures are adequately funded and equipped
- Federal health agencies maintain clear communication and public sensitisation mechanisms
- National preparedness plans for zoonotic and emerging infectious diseases are updated and operational
- Inter-agency collaboration is strengthened for disease prevention and containment

Proactive legislative engagement can help prevent avoidable public health crises and strengthen national resilience against future outbreaks.



Recommendations to the National Assembly:

Through its Committees on Health, Primary Healthcare and Communicable Diseases, Aviation, Maritime Safety, and National Emergency Management

The National Assembly is respectfully urged to:

1. Conduct an immediate public health preparedness oversight session by inviting the Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Port Health Services, Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), and relevant agencies to brief the committees on Nigeria's preparedness for hantavirus and other emerging infectious diseases.
2. Review current disease screening and surveillance mechanisms at airports, seaports, and land borders to determine operational readiness for imported disease threats.
3. Support increased funding for infectious disease laboratories, genomic surveillance systems, rapid response units, and emergency diagnostic infrastructure across the country.
4. Call on relevant health agencies to develop public awareness campaigns on emerging zoonotic diseases while preventing misinformation and unnecessary panic.
5. Examine existing infectious disease preparedness and emergency response frameworks to identify gaps requiring legislative or policy intervention.
6. Encourage stronger collaboration among health, immigration, aviation, maritime, and emergency management agencies for coordinated disease prevention and outbreak response.

Conclusion:

The WHO-confirmed hantavirus outbreak involving the Andes virus strain highlights the growing global risks associated with emerging infectious diseases and cross-border public health threats.

Although Nigeria has not recorded any confirmed case, the situation underscores the urgent need for proactive preparedness, stronger disease surveillance systems, and coordinated public health response mechanisms.

Legislative oversight by the National Assembly is essential to ensure that Nigeria's health institutions remain vigilant, adequately equipped, and capable of responding effectively to emerging disease threats before they escalate into national emergencies.

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