

Rift Valley Fever under control, says Tanzanian government

An outbreak of Rift Valley Fever (RVF) earlier this year has been brought under control, the country's livestock ministry said.

Dodoma - "There are no more cases of the viral disease in livestock. The viral disease is now under control," Charles Mlingwa, deputy minister for livestock development, told parliament in the country's administrative capital on 18 June.

RVF is a highly contagious viral disease that infects livestock and humans. The disease spread to 10 administrative regions in Tanzania between January and May, killing 134 of the 306 people infected, according to Mlingwa. The central region of Dodoma, where 85 people died, was the worst affected, the health minister, David Mwakyusa, said.

An ongoing mass vaccination of livestock helped bring the outbreak under control, according to veterinary officials. Other control measures included restrictions on livestock movement and a ban on the slaughter of cattle.

Mlingwa told parliament that people could now consume beef, but insisted public health officials must inspect the meat. "People must continue to avoid slaughtering sick animals," he stressed.

RVF was first diagnosed in January in the northern regions of Arusha and Manyara and by the end of May, cases of human and livestock infections and deaths had been reported in Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Iringa, Kilimanjaro, Mbeya, Morogoro, Singida and Tanga.

A total of 46,680 cattle, 56,990 goats and 32,900 sheep were infected. Some 5,610 cattle, 6,896 goats and 3,998 sheep died. He said the government spent about US\$3.84 million to bring the disease under control, with most of the money going on imported vaccines.

Red meat consumption falls

The RVF outbreak has resulted in a significant reduction in the consumption of red meat in the affected regions and surrounding areas. Incomes of livestock dependent communities have dwindled as a result.

"I used to sell more than 500kg of meat every day, but now I can hardly sell 100kg," said Rashid Khalfan, who operates a butchery in Kisutu, Dar es Salaam. Prices of fish and chicken in Dar es Salaam and other RVF-affected regions soared as demand rose.

In neighbouring Kenya, a total of 684 cases of RVF, including 155 deaths, were detected between 30 November 2006 and 12 March 2007, according to the United Nations World Health Organization.

The disease also hit Somalia, with 114 cases, including 51 deaths, reported in Juba, Gedo, Hiran, Middle Juba, Middle and Lower Shabelle regions between 19 December 2006 and 20 February 2007.

The RVF virus is spread to humans from livestock via the aedes mosquito, which breeds rapidly during floods.

It can be transmitted through contact with infected animal material, such as blood or organs. Consumption of milk, a staple for many pastoral people, is also thought to lead to infection. Symptoms in humans include bleeding through the nose and mouth and liver failure.

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