

Madagascar Plague Death Toll Rises to 195



The plague currently ravaging Madagascar has proved “resilient” to antibiotics because it is extremely rare, an expert has warned.

It comes as the death toll for the disease rises to 165 and 10 neighbouring countries are put on alert, according to the latest World Health Organization figures.

Dr Matthew Avison, from the University of Bristol, told The Daily Star the outbreak was likely to become more serious before it ends.

He said: “Because this disease is extremely rare, it doesn’t get exposed to antibiotics that often.

“That means it’s more resistant to antibiotics and the risk of death is higher.”

But he also added that it can be treated if drugs are handed out quickly.

His comments come as a medical expert warned that the deadly plague could mutate and become untreatable.

Professor Paul Hunter also warned it was possible for the disease to reach Europe and North America like the Ebola virus did in 2014 following an outbreak in West Africa.

Hunter, who lectures in health protection at the University of East Anglia, said: “As with any disease, it’s a real worry that it mutates and become untreatable.”

He told the Daily Star: “If it reaches the UK, Europe or the US it would be similar to the Ebola outbreak.

“We would probably have a few isolated cases but it shouldn’t spread like it has in Madagascar.”

Two thirds of the cases have been reported as pneumonic which is the most lethal

strain.

Dr Charlotte Ndiaye, who works for the World Health Organisation in Madagascar, said: "WHO is concerned that plague could spread further because it is already present in several cities and this is the start of the epidemic season, which usually runs from September to April."

The disease can be spread by coughing, sneezing, spitting and through contact with other fluids.

It is related to the Black Death which killed around 200 million people in Europe and Asia between 1346 and 1353.

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