

Meningitis epidemic kills more than 250 in Niger

May 4 2015

A meningitis epidemic in poverty-stricken Niger has claimed 252 lives since January, a health official said Monday, warning the country was short of vaccines to fight the outbreak.

"As of May 3, 252 people died out of a total of 3,304 cases," said Niger's epidemics surveillance and response director Goumbi Kadade.

Less than two weeks ago, the government had put the toll at 129 people out of 1,150 cases.

"The number of cases has risen in the past three weeks. This worries us, because there aren't enough vaccines. Our orders are arriving in dribs and drabs," Kadade added.

A meningitis epidemic has been declared in eight districts of Niger, while three others are in a state of alert, the official said.

The whole of Niger is currently under quarantine, in an effort to contain the highly contagious disease.

Some 300,000 [vaccine doses](#) have arrived in the west African landlocked country, and are currently being distributed.

That is less than half the amount the authorities ordered, and far below the 1.8 million doses actually needed to stop the epidemic, Kadade said.

One reason for the [vaccine shortage](#) is a meningitis epidemic in northern Nigeria, near Niger, the doctor said.

The epidemic's mortality rate in Niger has shrunk in the past weeks, because patients are now being given antibiotics, he added.

Niger, one of the world's [poorest countries](#), is prone to meningitis epidemics.

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