What is Lassa fever?
Lassa fever is an acute viral illness that occurs in West Africa. The virus, a member of the virus family Arenaviridae, is zoonotic, or animal-borne.

While Lassa fever is mild or has no observable symptoms in about 80% of people infected with the virus, the remaining 20% have a severe multi-system disease.

Where is Lassa fever found?
Lassa fever is an endemic (constantly present) disease in portions of West Africa. It is recognized in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, as well as Nigeria.

In what animal host is Lassa virus maintained?
The reservoir, or host, of Lassa virus is a rodent known as the "multimammate rat" of the genus Mastomys.

How do humans get Lassa fever?
The virus may be spread to humans by:
- Direct contact with infected rodent urine and droppings, through touching objects or eating food contaminated with these materials, or through cuts or sores.
- Breathing in tiny particles in the air contaminated with rodent excretions.
- Eating an infected rodent.
- Person-to-person contact with virus in the blood, tissue, secretions, or excretions of an individual infected with the Lassa virus.

What are the symptoms of Lassa fever?
Signs and symptoms of Lassa fever typically occur 1-3 weeks after exposure and include:
- Fever
- Retrosternal pain (pain behind the chest wall)
- Sore throat
- Back pain
- Cough
- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Conjunctivitis
- Facial swelling
- Proteinuria (protein in the urine)
- Mucosal bleeding

Neurological problems have also been described, including hearing loss, tremors, and encephalitis.

Are there complications after recovery?
The most common complication of Lassa fever is deafness. Various degrees of deafness occur in approximately one-third of cases, and in many cases hearing loss is permanent. Spontaneous abortion is another serious complication.

How is Lassa fever treated?
Ribavirin, an antiviral drug, has been used with success in Lassa fever patients. It has been shown to be most effective when given early in the course of the illness. Patients should also receive supportive care consisting of maintenance of appropriate fluid and electrolyte balance, oxygenation and blood pressure, as well as treatment of any other complicating infections.

How is Lassa fever prevented?
There is no vaccine for Lassa fever. The best prevention is to avoid contact whenever possible with infected people, as well as with rodents.

For more information on Lassa fever:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/spb/mnpages/dispages/lassaf.htm

CDC Public Information
English 1-888-246-2675
Espanol 1-888-246-2857
TTY 1-888-874-2646

Public Health – Muskegon County
209 E Apple Ave, Muskegon, MI 49442
www.muskegonhealth.net
Phone: (231) 724-6246