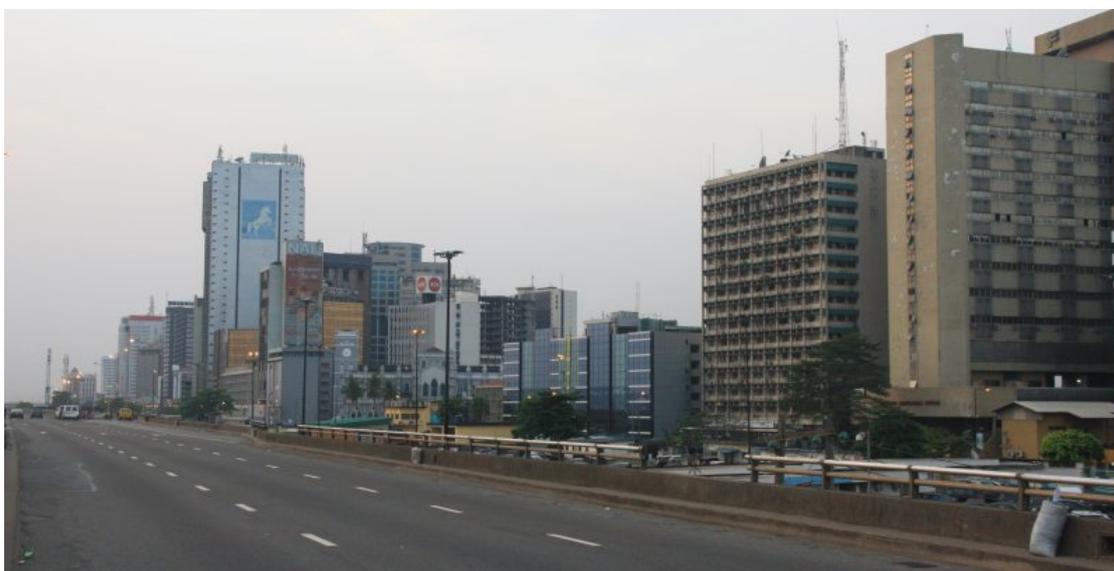


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An Italian national is the index case patient of COVID-19 disease in Nigeria · Global Voices

7-8 minuti



Lagos skyline, February 28, 2015. Photo by Clara Sanchiz/RNW via Flickr CC BY 2.0.

On February 27, Nigeria’s Minister of Health, Dr. E. Osagie Ehanire confirmed the index case of COVID-19 coronavirus disease in Lagos, Nigeria.

In [a press statement](#), Dr. Ehanire declared the first established patient as “an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy, to Lagos, Nigeria,” on February 25, 2020. Based on a diagnostic report from the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, the minister further asserted that the “patient is clinically stable, with no serious

symptoms, and is being managed at the Infectious Disease Hospital in Yaba, Lagos.”

Consequently, the Nigerian government has activated a multi-sectoral Coronavirus Preparedness Group under the leadership of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to “work closely with the Lagos State Health authorities to respond to this case and implement firm control measures,” according to Dr. Ehanire.

As of February 27, China has reported a total of 78,630 cases of COVID-19 with 2,747 deaths.

Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr. Tedros Adhanom, [stated that](#) the world is “at a decisive point” in this pandemic because the “number of new cases reported in the rest of the world, has exceeded the number of new cases in China”:

Outside China, there are now 3,474 cases in 44 countries, and 54 deaths. ... And in the past 24 hours, seven countries have reported cases for the first time: Brazil, Georgia, Greece, North Macedonia, Norway, Pakistan and Romania.

The BBC [stated that](#) as of February 26, Italy has witnessed a total of 400 reported cases of COVID-19 so far. This is a dramatic spike from 80 cases the previous day. Although the outbreak is focused on a small cluster of towns – Lombardy (near Milan) and Veneto (near Venice), – “the outbreak has killed 12 people,” the BBC reported.

Italy has also been the source of the spread to “a growing list of countries around the world,” Reuters [further reported](#). Israel recently barred “entry to non-Israelis who had visited Italy in the past two weeks.”

Is Lagos a time bomb for the COVID-19 pandemic?

Lagos, with an [estimated population](#) of 21 million people, the largest city [in Africa and the seventh](#) fastest-growing city in the world, is an epidemiological nightmare.

VIDEO: How travellers undergo screening for [#coronavirus](#) at [#Lagos](#) airport [#COVID19 pic.twitter.com/LuQMnc5c7X](#)

— TheCable (@thecableng) [February 27, 2020](#)

The swift response of Nigeria's health ministry is commendable. However, the laboratory diagnosis report of the index case in Nigeria became available on February 27 — two days after the infected Italian traveler arrived in Lagos. The Port Health Services should have been more proactive in sharing this news, considering that COVID-19 had witnessed an exponential rise in Italy over the past few weeks.

Now the real work of fast and accurate contact tracing is imperative, considering that Lagos is a commercial hub in Nigeria. The likelihood of a rapid spread to other parts of the country is a looming possibility.

Dispelling misinformation, quelling panic

Netizens are already making efforts to quell any form of misinformation from generating undue panic following the entry of COVID-19 into Nigeria:

Everybody's now an epidemiologist & infectious diseases expert.

Please, just practice good hygiene. Spread facts, not panic. Let the experts do their job. Share only verified information.

COVID19 is a flu virus with very low mortality.

Stupid people are deadlier than the virus

— A Fokken Queen! 👑 (@cremechic11) [February 28, 2020](#)

It's better to share hygiene tips rather than inducing mass hysteria:

As Nigeria confirms first case of Coronavirus in Lagos, this is all you need to know about the virus and how to play safe.

Don't panic!!! ⚠️ [#coronavirusnigeria](#)

pic.twitter.com/KVon7k6CxN

— Ondo First Born® (@OndoFirstBorn) [February 28, 2020](#)

Another netizen also cautioned against hysteria:

Coronavirus confirmed in Nigeria. 😞😞

To be honest, Nigeria did a good job monitoring so far as I expected it sooner.

But now I am afraid of the panic, fake news and hysteria among our older citizens.

Times like this I wish I still did Reason Am.

Abi make I quick voice sontin? 😞

— Ruona J. Meyer (@RGAMeyer) [February 28, 2020](#)

Déjà vu of Ebola case in Nigeria

In July 2014, Nigerians were thrown into a similar panic when the country recorded its index Ebola case. Patrick Sawyer, an American Liberian who had nursed a sick Ebola relative in Liberia, collapsed in the Lagos airport upon arriving Nigeria. He was rushed to hospital where he was initially treated for malaria. He died some days later. Sawyer was diagnosed with Ebola days before his death.

On October 20, 2014, however, WHO declared Nigeria Ebola-

free. Nigeria overcame the most explosive Ebola outbreak that started in Lagos through epidemiological ground-level work. It was so unprecedented that even the usually measured WHO [declared the feat](#) “a piece of world-class epidemiological detective work.”

Nigeria kicked Ebola, that gives so much hope we'll handle Corona virus too. Wishing all the health workers involved safe operations. Can't be easy knowing you can be infected with just one slip.

— Mngusuul Uji (@brendauji) [February 28, 2020](#)

Empowered to respond

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) — the institution empowered to respond and track cases of infectious outbreaks in Nigeria — is prepared for this outbreak.

Nigeria has its first Coronavirus case. My prediction: their experience with Polio and Ebola are going to result in them handling this more competently than most Western democracies. <https://t.co/PFmVGLKZw1>

— Shelby Grossman (@shelbygrossman) [February 28, 2020](#)

Amy Maxmen [writing for Nature](#), a research journal, stated that in the past two years, the NCDC head, Chikwe Ihekweazu, has “more than doubled the size of the NCDC staff, set up a network of molecular-biology labs across the country” in order “to diffuse the threat that an epidemic in Nigeria poses for the rest of the world.”

We are dealing with a new virus. There are 47 countries that have reported at least 1 case

A case is not a sign of failure. Our [@NCDCgov](#) was set up for situations like this. We are working 24/7 with the relevant state governments

Please avoid rumours & panic [#FactsNotFear](#)

pic.twitter.com/k5kIXJDNL1

— Chikwe Ihekweazu (@Chikwe_I) [February 28, 2020](#)

Time will tell if Nigeria will surpass and curtail this COVID-19 pandemic as it did with the Ebola outbreak.

Check out Global Voices' special coverage of [the global impact of COVID-19](#).