

Nodding Disease Outbreak Baffles Doctors in Uganda

Health authorities are desperately seeking answers following an outbreak of the mysterious nodding disease in northern Uganda.

Since March, more than 2,000 children have been diagnosed with Nodding Disease Syndrome (NDS) in northern Uganda.

The United States Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organisation, and the Ugandan health ministry have taken samples from sick children to try to discover the cause of NDS.

NDS mostly affects children and causes them to nod their heads violently and suffer convulsions, especially when eating or when cold.

The uncontrolled nodding can also be triggered by changes in the weather. Other symptoms include stunting and decreased mental capacity.

Infected children frequently drop out of school due to poor health and the stigma surrounding the disease. They are often unable or unwilling to eat, and can die of starvation.

Preliminary findings from the Ministry of Health suggest NDS could be linked to a parasitic worm that causes river blindness. So far, there is no evidence that the disease is contagious.

Although there is no known cure for NDS, government health facilities have had some success treating patients with anticonvulsant drugs and improving their nutrition.

An assessment conducted by World Vision in northern Uganda identified 104 children registered in its child sponsorship

programmes who are suffering from the disease.

Albert Siminyu, World Vision's national director for Uganda, says the organization has already started emergency response in Kitgum to support to those affected.

This includes nutritious food and warm blankets to affected households and essential medicines to district health facilities.

World Vision will also help train village health committees to ensure suspected cases are detected and reported early.

A similar response will begin in Gulu district in the coming weeks.