

# *Meningitis Epidemic Claims Nearly 130 Lives in Niger*

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Niamey, April 25 (RHC)-- Niger's health minister says the death toll from the meningitis epidemic that broke out in the West African country in January has reached nearly 130. Mango Aghali said in a statement on Friday: "There are a total of 1,150 cases and unfortunately 129 deaths."

Some 70 of the deaths occurred in capital, Niamey, which was reported to be the hardest hit by the disease. "Three of the five districts" in Niamey are in "an epidemic state," Aghali said, adding: "It is to be feared that the two others will also be the same."

The previous death toll, announced on April 19, stood at 85 out of 908 cases across the country. The Nigerien Health Ministry has said the disease is spreading fast.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says Niger, which is among the world's most impoverished countries, is often prone to such epidemics due to its position in the so-called "Meningitis Belt" in Africa, which stretches from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east.

The belt also includes parts of Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Sudan. These countries are considered hyperendemic. The populations in these countries are at the highest risk of developing meningitis, and deadly outbreaks of the disease take victims every year.

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