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LASSA FEVER VIRUS DISEASE
SURVEY REPORT

February 2020

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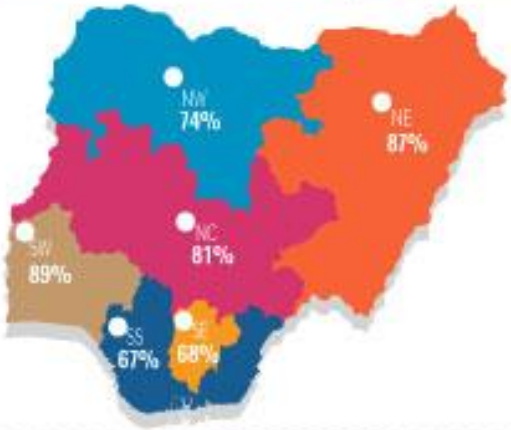
LASSA FEVER VIRUS DISEASE
2020 SURVEY

78%

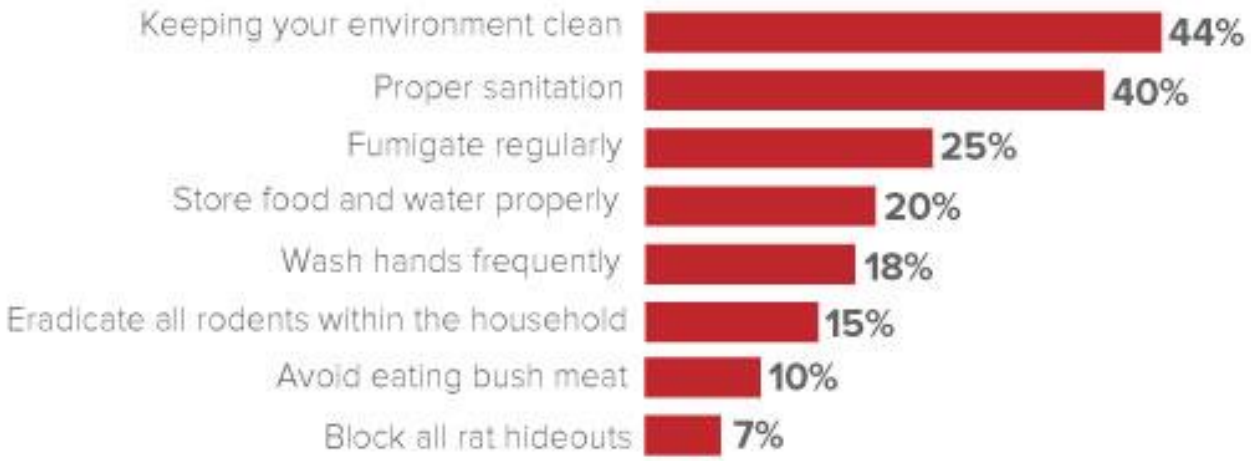
Are aware of the recent outbreak of **Lassa Fever**
a 2% decline from 80% in 2018



Perceived opinions on how the Lassa Fever Virus is transmitted

- **89%** Rats infecting food stuff
- **16%** Contact with infected persons
- **12%** Eating bush meat
- **1%** Contact with health care workers

Some preventive measures taken to avoid being infected by the virus



How confident are you that your local hospital has the capacity to provide the needed care and manage cases of Lassa fever?

- **83%** Confident
- **17%** Not Confident

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1.0 Executive Summary

In 2016 and 2018, NOIPolls in partnership with EpiAFRIC conducted an opinion poll to seek the perceptions of Nigerians regarding the awareness of, mode of transmission of, symptoms of and awareness on possible preventive measures for Lassa Fever. The poll was repeated in 2020 and showed that a high level of awareness about the outbreak in the country was maintained though with 2 percent drop when compared to the 2018 survey.

The poll result revealed that there is a high level of Lassa Fever disease awareness amongst Nigerians and awareness is highest in the South-West (89 percent) and North-East zones (87 percent) of the country. The poll also showed that this awareness is commonly driven through radio (50 percent), television (31 percent), word of mouth (22 percent), Social media (20 percent) and newspapers (8 percent). With regards to transmission, rat infected food stuff is generally believed to be the main mode of transmission, while some identified fever (44 percent), headache (35 percent), mucosal bleeding (14 percent) and vomitting (12 percent) to be among the symptoms of the disease.

Further findings revealed that respondents (44 percent) maintained that keeping their houses clean especially the kitchen is one of the ways in which they can avoid being infected by the virus. While majority of the Nigerians (95 percent) indicated that they are willing to go to public hospital or health care if affected by the disease, 59 percent of Nigerians also expressed their confidence with their local hospital to be able to manage cases of Lassa Fever in the country. Lastly, 83 percent of the respondents admitted that the Ministry of Health has being carrying out enough sentisization about the disease across the country.

2.0 Survey Background and Objectives

Lassa fever is a severe and often deadly virus-related illness, with fever, caused by Lassa virus and happening predominantly in West Africa. It is also known as Lassa Hemorrhagic Fever (LHF) and is typically acquired from infected rodents. Research has shown that it is prevalent during the dry season. Lassa fever was first discovered originally in 1969 in Lassa, a remote village in Borno State, Nigeria and since then, there have been numerous outbursts of different level and severity across West Africa.

A yearly assessment of this deadly disease revealed as much as 5, 000 deaths and 300, 000 infections across West Africa, yet, lack of resources to detect the illness on time, insufficient data and inadequate surveillance had resulted in several other cases not accounted for.[1] The World health Organization describes Lassa fever as endemic in Nigeria and the annual peak of human cases is usually observed during the dry season (December–April). This follows the reproduction cycle of the Mastomys species of rats in the wet season (May – June).

Recently, response to Lassa fever has improved in Nigeria, led by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). NCDC has done so much work to prevent and respond to Lassa fever at the national level. However, it is imperative that states and local governments take responsibility to sustain the work of the NCDC in their respective locations. NCDC activated a National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) with an inter-disciplinary, multi-partner technical team to ensure a well-coordinated response and swift control of Lassa fever outbreaks across affected states. Confirmed cases are being treated in the designated treatment centers in the affected states following optimized

[1] http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/spb/mnpages/dispages/Fact_Sheets/Lassa_Fever_Fact_Sheet.pdf

standard of care protocols. Guidelines for appropriate case management and infection prevention and control (IPC) measures have been disseminated to the different states.

While Nigeria is a Lassa fever endemic country and the NCDC has developed capacity for managing Lassa fever outbreaks, the current overall risk is considered moderate at national level. However, risks exist mostly due to socio-cultural practice in food management and lack of proper hygiene. Prevention of Lassa fever relies on promoting good "community hygiene" to discourage rodents from entering homes. Effective measures include storing grain and other foodstuffs in rodent-proof containers, disposing of garbage far from the home, and maintaining clean households. Given this background, NOIPolls in partnership with EpiAfric conducted a recent poll to seek the perceptions of Nigerians regarding the awareness, mode of transmission, symptoms and to ascertain their awareness on possible preventive measures of Lassa Fever.

3.0 Methodology

The survey was conducted through telephone interviews in the week of **January 27th 2020**. A proportionate random nationwide selected sample of 1,000 phone-owning Nigerians, 18 years and above, were interviewed across the six geopolitical zones in the country using a well-structured questionnaire. This sample size provides a 95percent confidence interval that the results obtained are within a range of plus or minus 4.65percent of the opinions of population. The interviews were conducted in English, Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba. The use of several Nigerian languages reduces the likelihood of a non-response bias.

4.0 Demographic Distribution

The demographic distribution of the respondents was analysed by the following groups: gender, age-group, geo-political zones, and occupation as illustrated in Figure 1 below. The gender and the geo-political zone demographic distribution of the respondents were in the same proportion with the 2016 National Population Census.

Gender: The proportion of male and female respondents was almost equal with 51 percent and 49 percent respectively.

Age-Group: The age-group with the highest frequency in the survey was 36-60 (58 percent) and the lowest age-group represented was 60+ (6 percent).

Geo-Political Zone: All geo-political zones were adequately represented in the survey, the highest represented zone being the North-West zone (24 percent) and the lowest being the South-East zone
(12 percent).

Occupation: The highest proportion of respondents surveyed were self-employed traders (34 percent) followed by government worker/civil servant (21 percent). The lowest represented occupation in the survey are Youth Corpers with 1 percent.

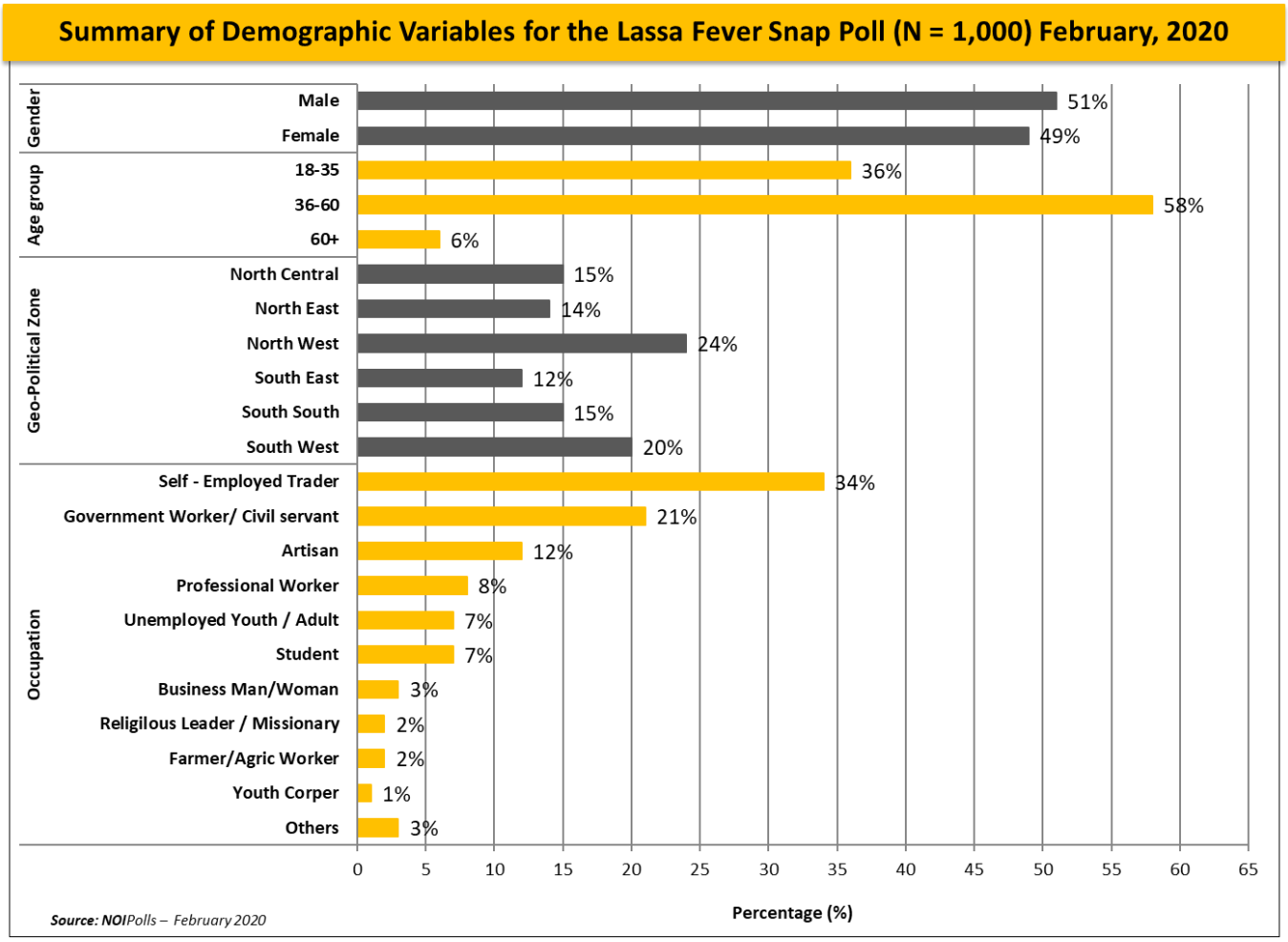

Figure 1: Demographic distribution

5.0 Survey Results

Respondents to the poll were asked eight specific questions. This section of the report presents findings from each question.

5.1 Awareness On The Outbreak Of Lassa Fever Virus Disease

The 2020 survey shows that 78 percent of the respondents were aware of the recent outbreak of Lassa Fever Virus in the country. In the 2018 survey, respondents' level of awareness on the Lassa Fever outbreak was 80 percent, while 2016 report showed that 81 percent awareness. This means that there has been a total 3 percent decrease in level of awareness since 2016

Further analysis indicates that in 2020, North-East, North-central and North-east zones had higher levels of awareness of the outbreak of Lassa Fever disease. However, while the south west zone had the highest score of 89 percent, the south-south and south east zones showed the lowest level of awareness at 67 percent and 68 percent respectively, despite being among zones with most cases of Lassa fever.

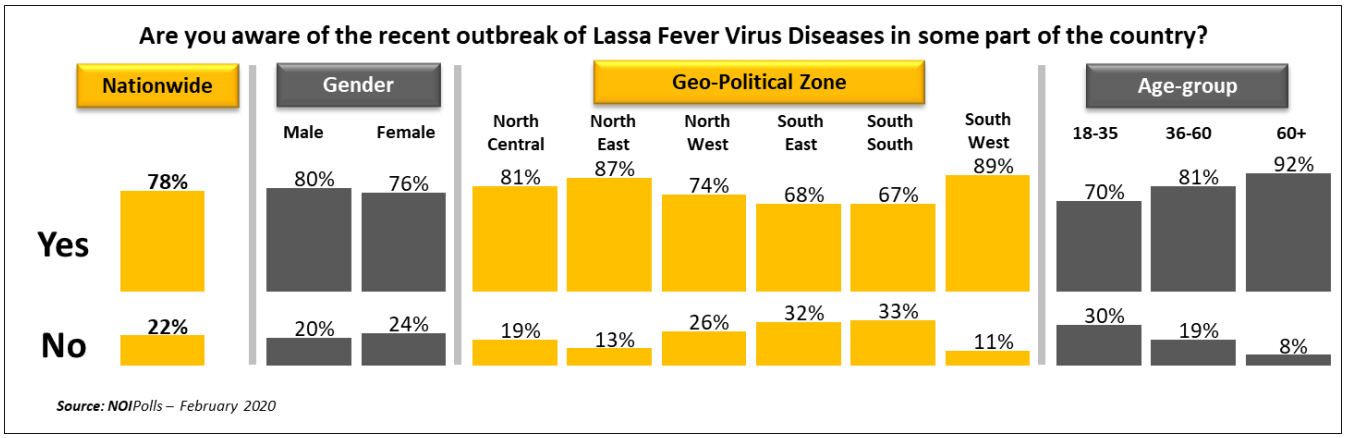

Figure 2: The level of awareness on the outbreak of the Lassa Fever Virus Disease

Past survey shows very similar levels of awareness across age distribution. However, the 2020 poll shows more people above 60 years of age are aware of the disease compared to youths aged between 18 and 35 years. Nationwide, there has been a 3 percent point decrease in awareness since the 2016.

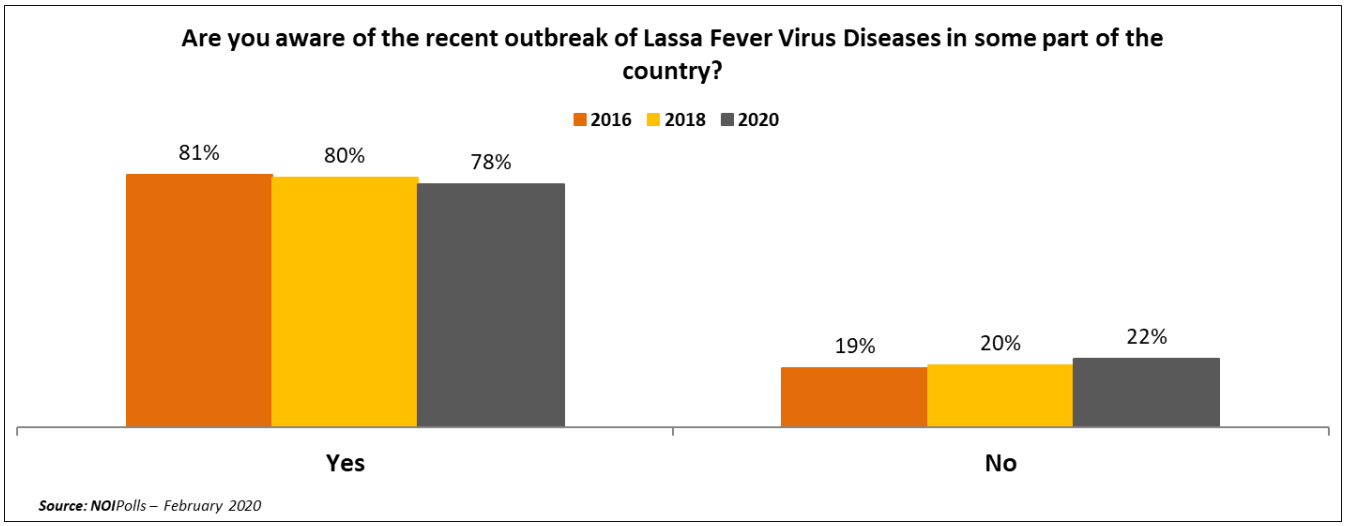

Figure 3: Trend on Level of awareness

5.2 Main Channel Of Awareness

During the survey, it was important to note the respondents' source of awareness. The 2020 survey results indicate that, when the question "How did you hear about the outbreak of Lassa Fever disease?" was asked, 'radio' (50 percent) topped the list of sources of awareness and 'television' was second with 31 percent.

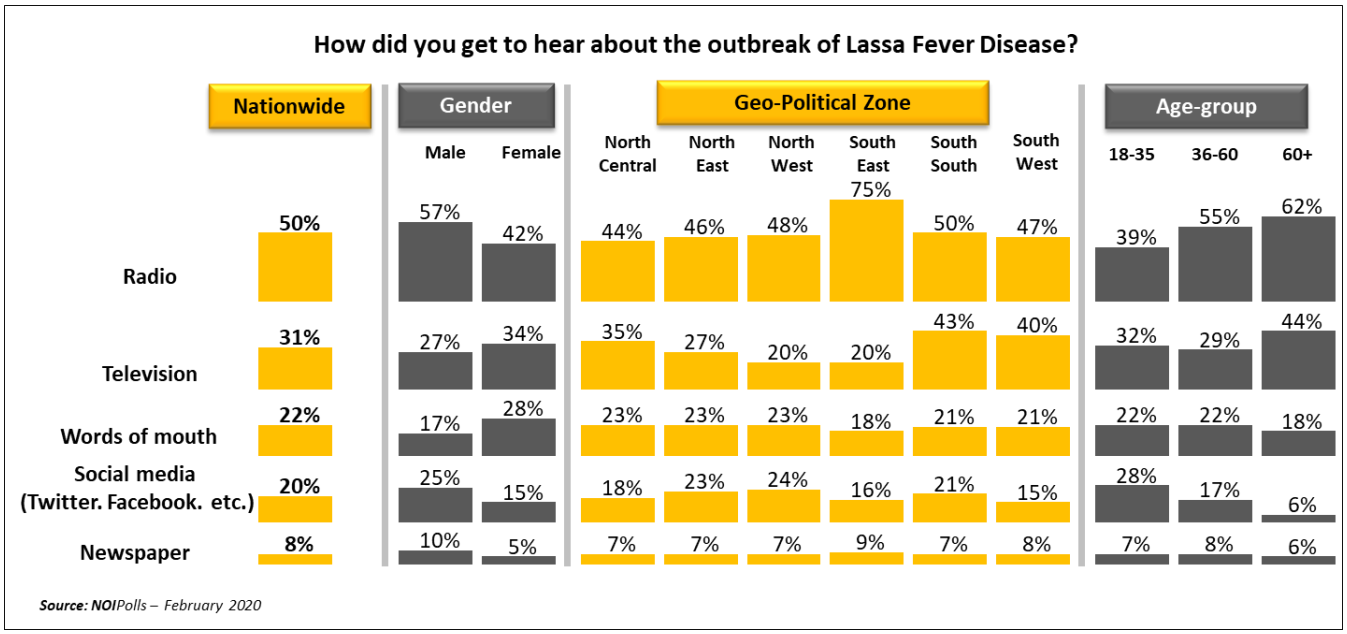

Figure 4: Source of awareness

In comparison with past polls, there is a steady increase for radio from 39 percent in 2016. Social media also increased by 9 percent (from 11 percent at the 2018 to 20 percent in the 2020). It further indicates a decline in information dissemination from TV by 16 percent between 2016 and 2020 polls.

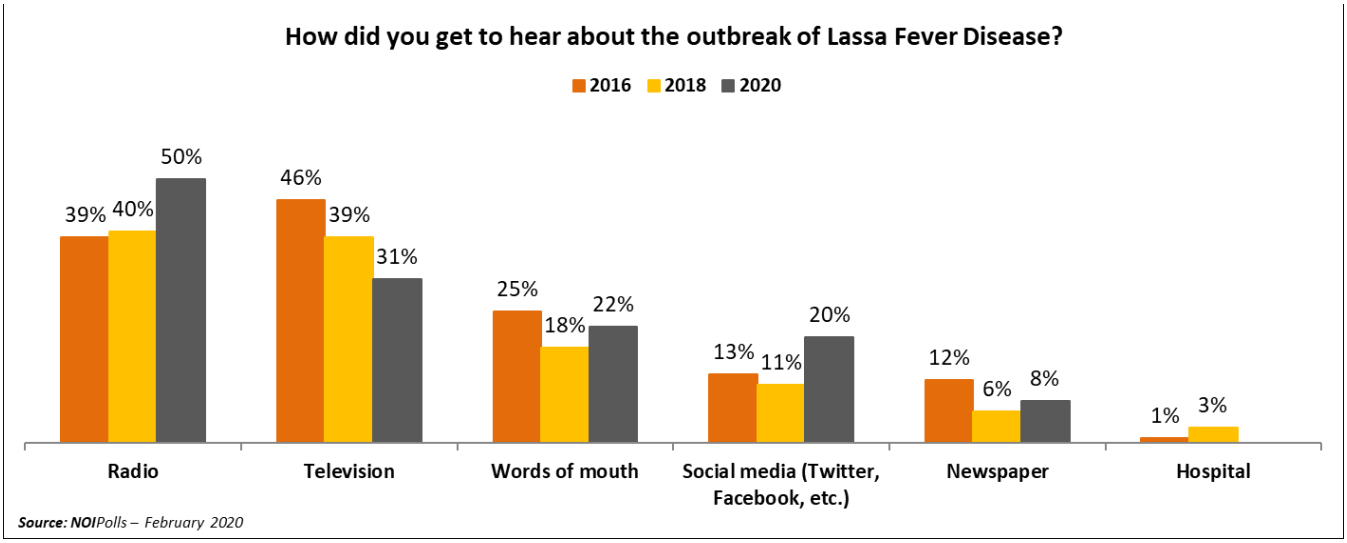

Figure 5: Trend on Source of Awareness

5.3 Mode Of Transmitting The Disease

The survey sought to assess respondents' knowledge on the modes of transmission of Lassa fever. Nationwide, the mode of transmission with the highest value cited by participants was 'rat infected food stuff' (which is 9 percent more than the 2018 survey results). Across gender, geo-political zones and age groups, this was the most widely held opinion; 12 percent of respondents indicated that Lassa fever virus is transmitted by 'eating bush meat' (4 percent more than indicated in the 2018 poll).

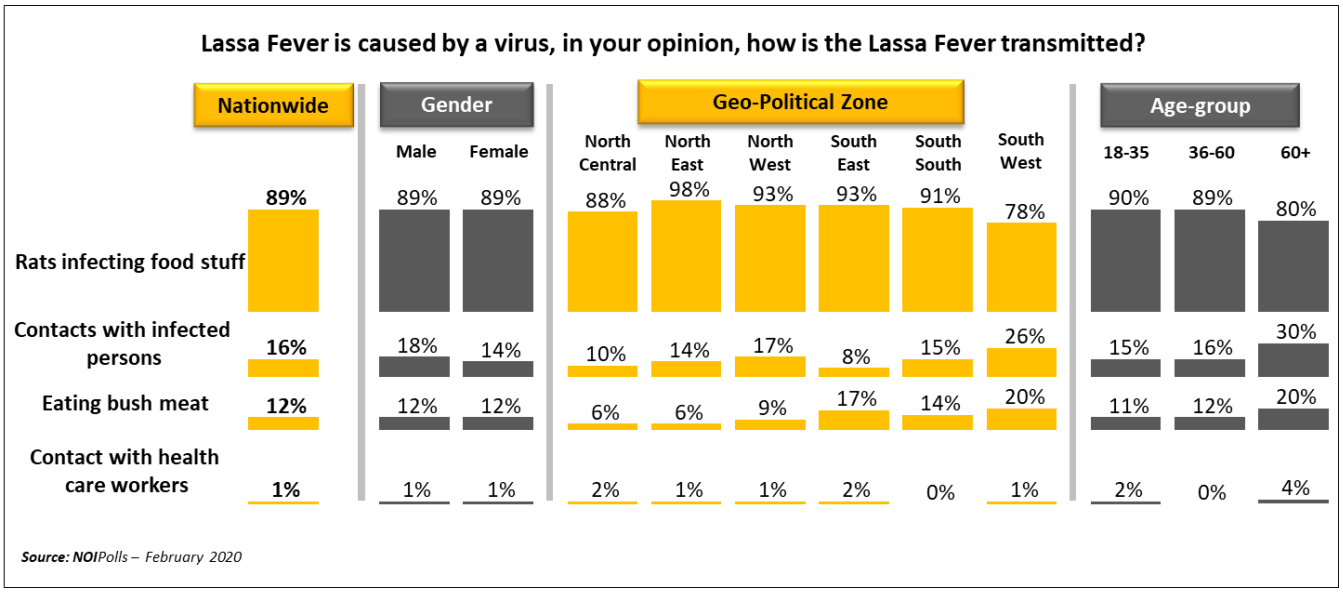

Figure 6: The mode of transmission

A comparison of the 2018 and 2020 survey results shows a 9 percent-point Increase in knowledge.

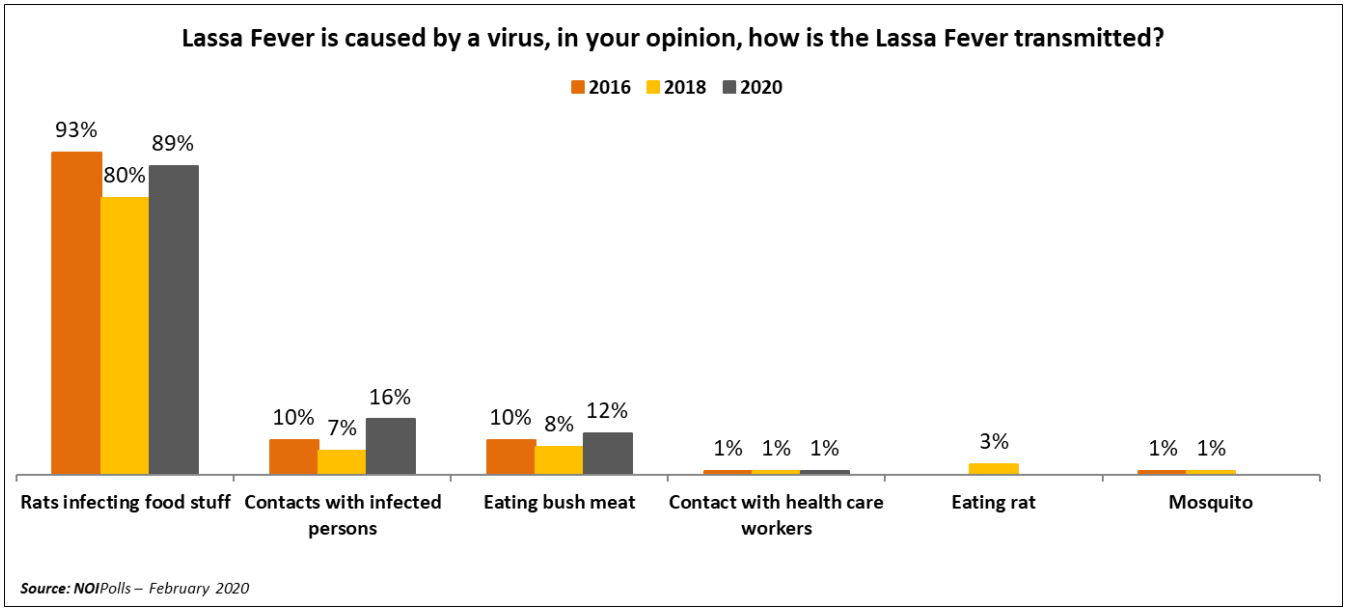

Figure 7: Trend on the mode of transmission

5.4 The Symptoms Of Lassa Fever

Symptoms of Lassa fever mimic those of malaria, therefore it is important to know these similarities in symptoms. To determine their level of awareness, respondents were asked to identify symptoms exhibited by Lassa Fever patients. Findings from the survey revealed that 44 percent of respondents identified fever as a symptom of Lassa fever (a massive 22 percent decrease from 2018 poll). Thirty-five percent of respondents identified headache as a symptom of Lassa fever, 3 percent identified chest pain as a symptom of Lassa fever, 2 percent identified facial swelling as a symptom of Lassa fever. Other symptoms the respondents mentioned were sore throat (8 percent), chest pain (3 percent) and back pain (5 percent) and facial swelling (2 percent).

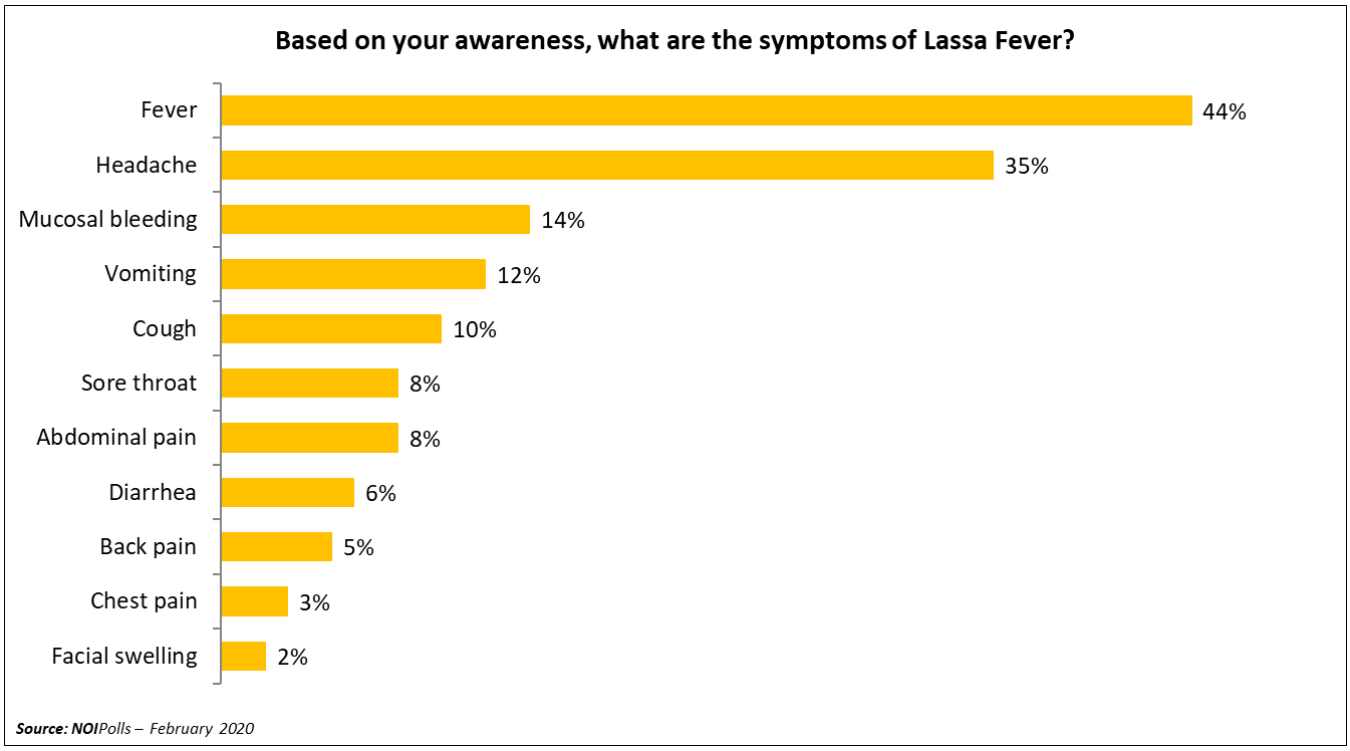

Figure 8: The symptoms of the disease

Trend analysis shows that mucosal bleeding reduced by 9 percent from 2018 and 23 percent since 2016. There is also similar decrease in knowledge on symptoms shown in vomiting which was 33 percent as at 2016 but its reduced to 12 percent in 2020 polls.

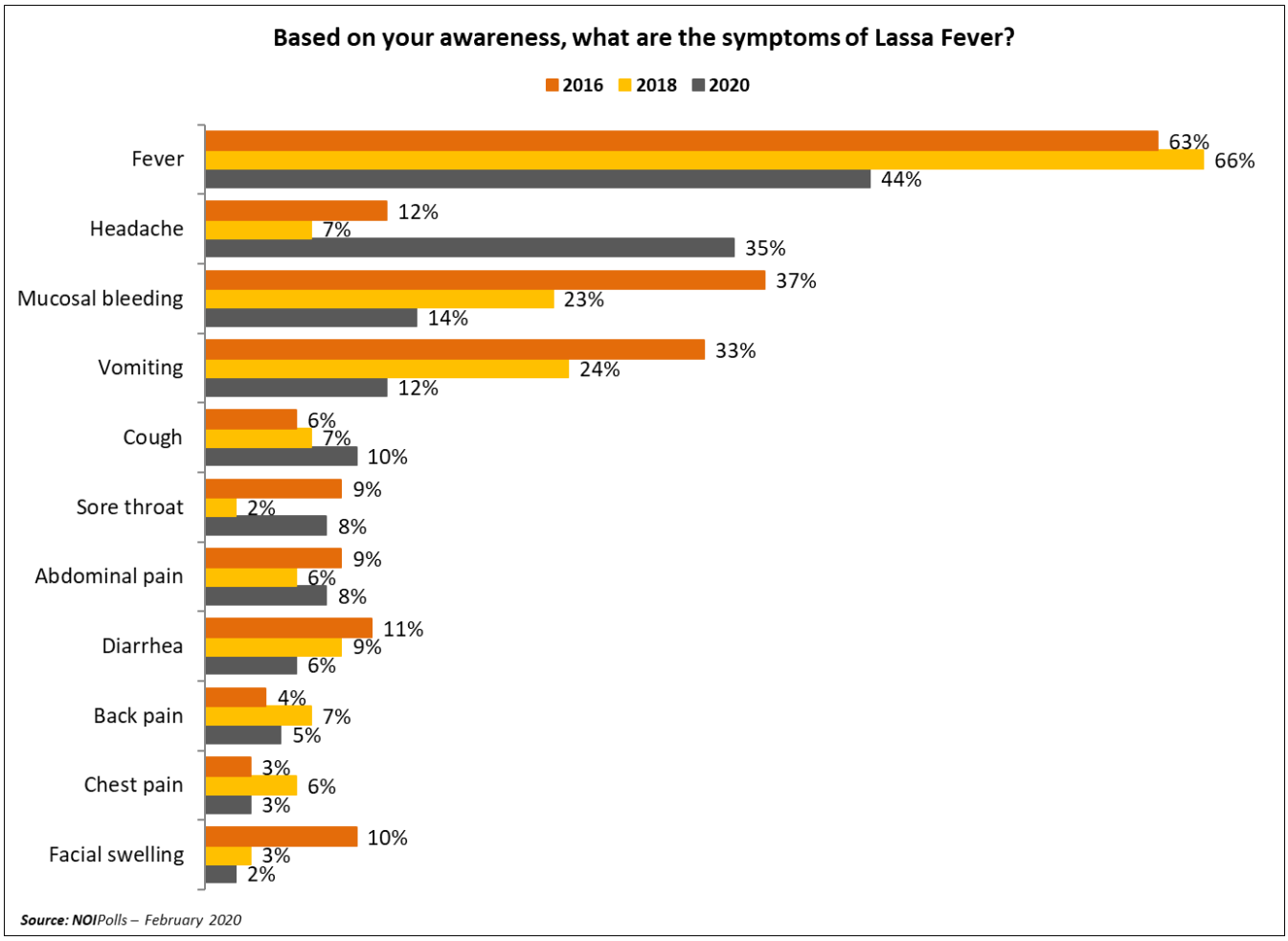

Figure 9: Trend on the symptoms of the disease

5.5 Perception On Preventing The Disease

The survey also sought to assess respondents' knowledge of the preventive measures people can take to avoid being infected. Respondents were asked 'what preventive measures would you take to avoid being infected by the virus?'. Forty-four percent of respondents identified "keep the house clean especially the kitchen" as a preventive measure to take to avoid being infected by a virus. In contrast, 7 percent of respondents identified "block all rat hideouts" as a preventive measure to take to avoid being infected by a virus.

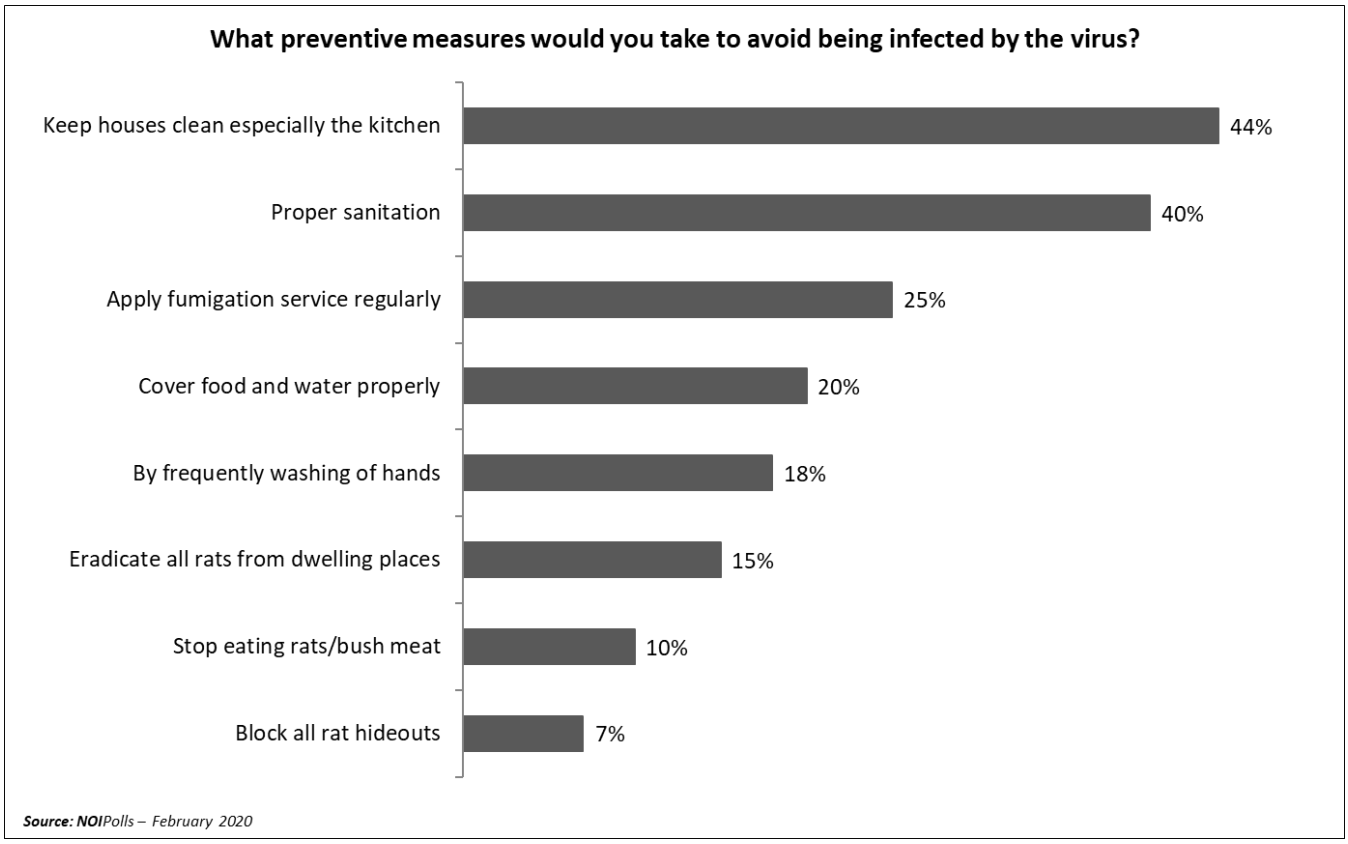

Figure 10: Preventive measure

Trend analysis shows a 4 percent decrease from 2018 results on the proportion of respondents who mentioned that they keep their house clean.

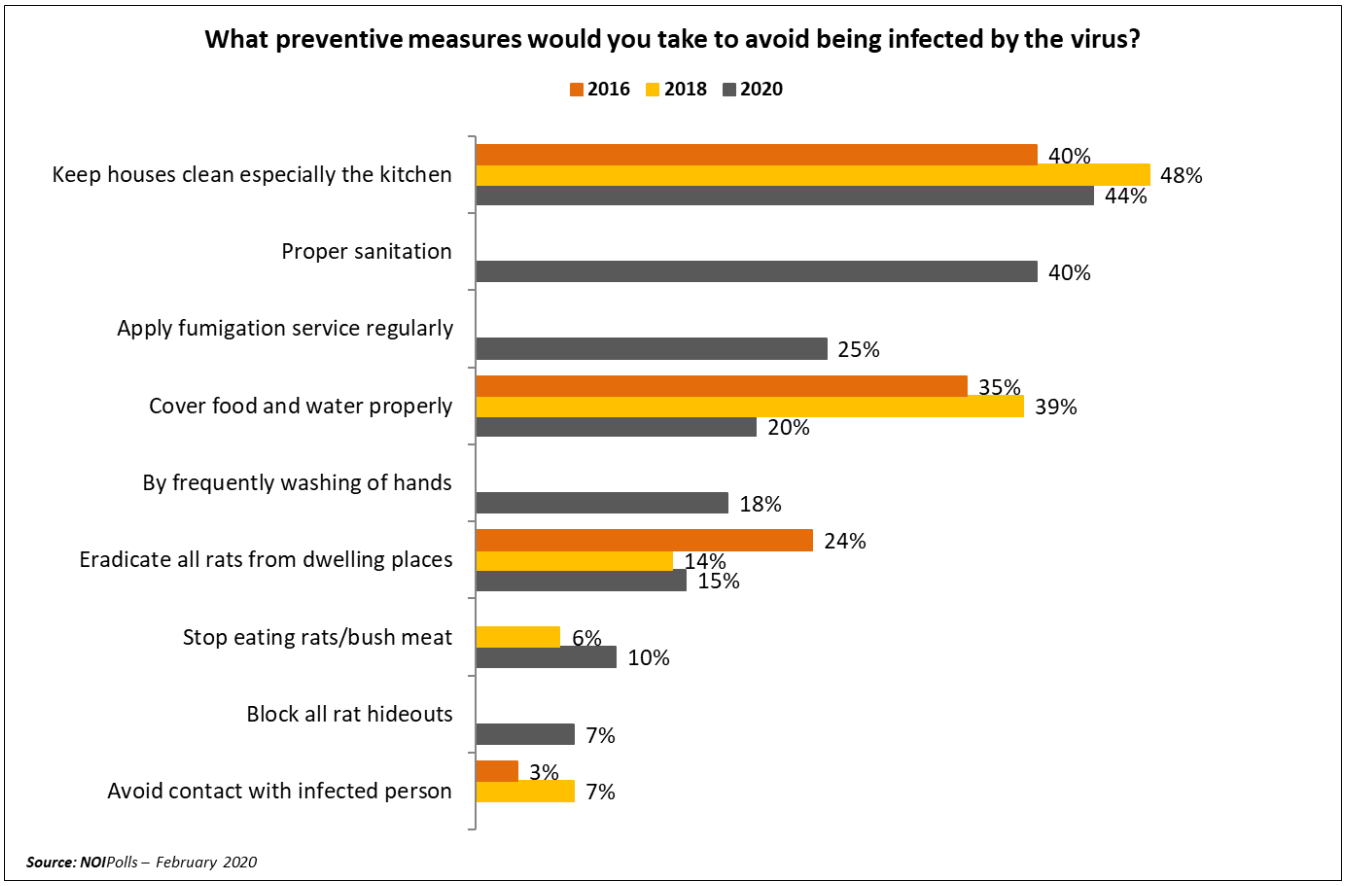

Figure 11: Trend on preventive measure

5.6 Willingness To Seek Care

Findings form the survey revealed that 95 percent of respondents would be willing to go to a public hospital/primary health center if they were infected by the disease.

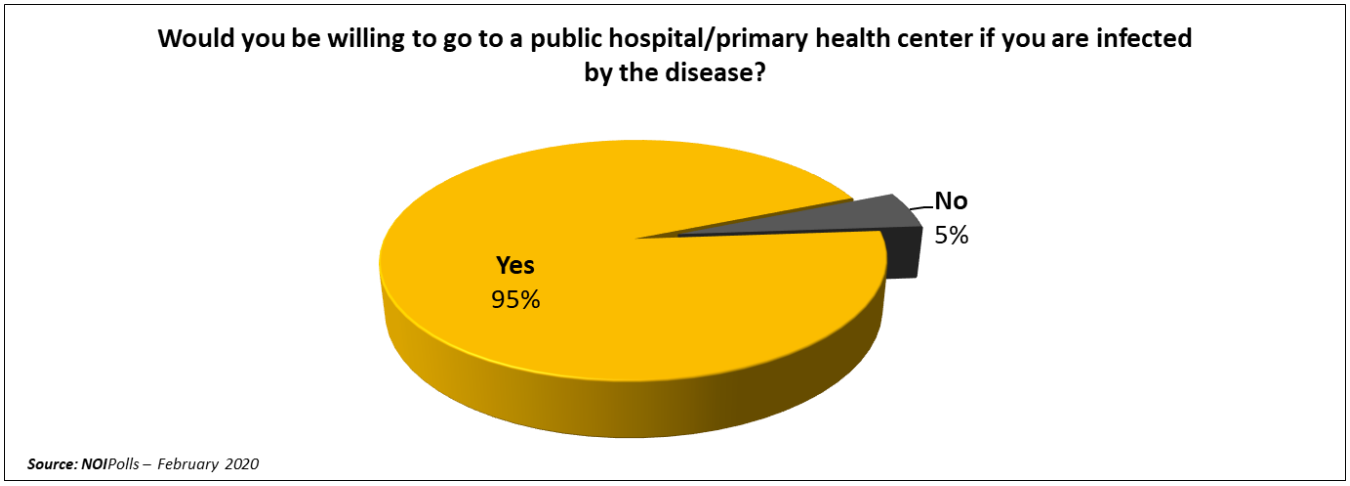

Figure 12: Willingness to seek care

Findings from the survey revealed in 2016 and 2018 that 92 percent of respondents would be willing to go to a public hospital/primary health center if they were infected by the disease. However, in 2020, 95 percent of

respondents would be willing to go to a public hospital/primary health center if they were infected by the disease. This shows a 3 percent-point increase in health-seeking behaviours.

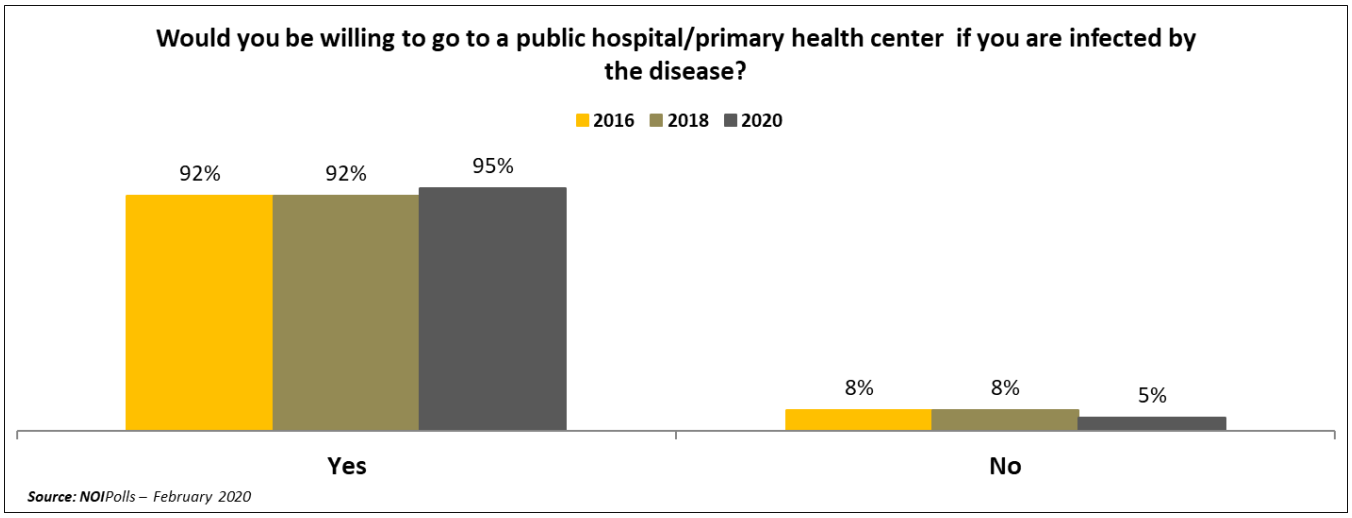

Figure 13: Trend on willingness to seek care

5.7 Level Of Confidence In Local Hospitals

Findings from the survey revealed that 59 percent of respondents showed confidence in the ability of their local hospital to provide the needed care in managing of Lassa fever.

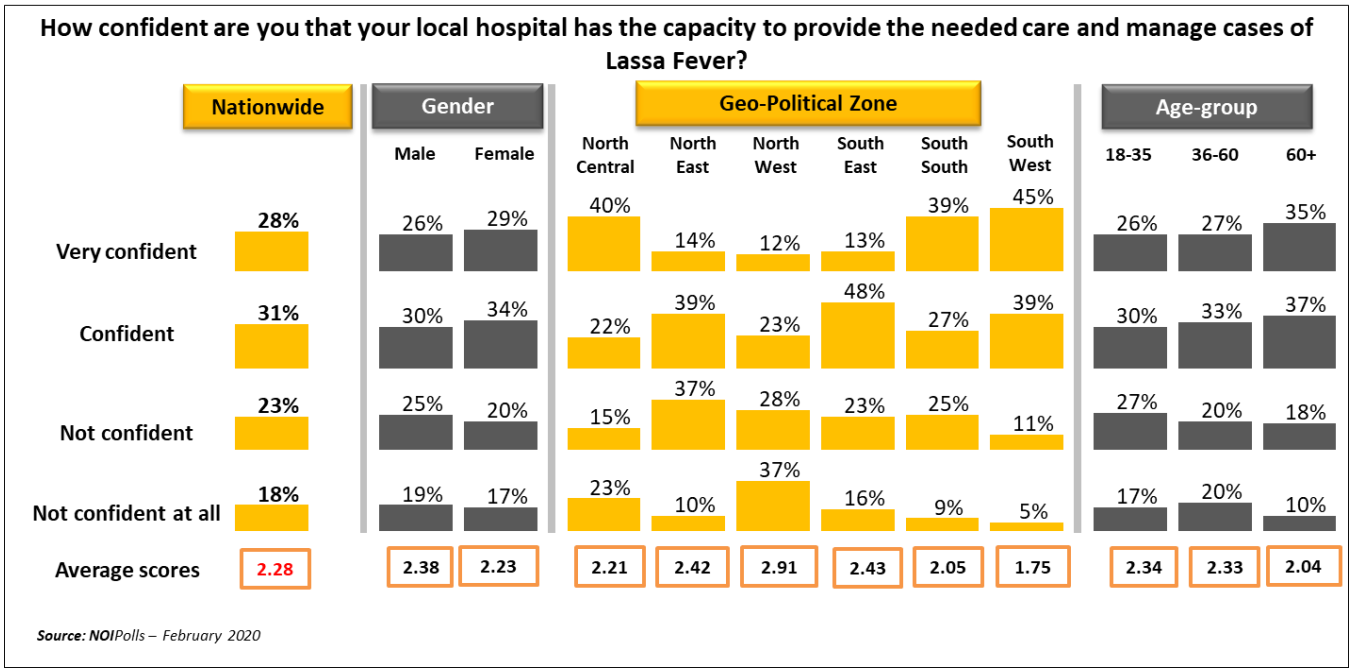

Figure 14: Confidence in local hospitals

Trend analysis shows that confidence was 70 percent in 2016, and 63 percent in 2018. The lowest level of confidence in 2020 is seen in the North-west zone at 35 percent.

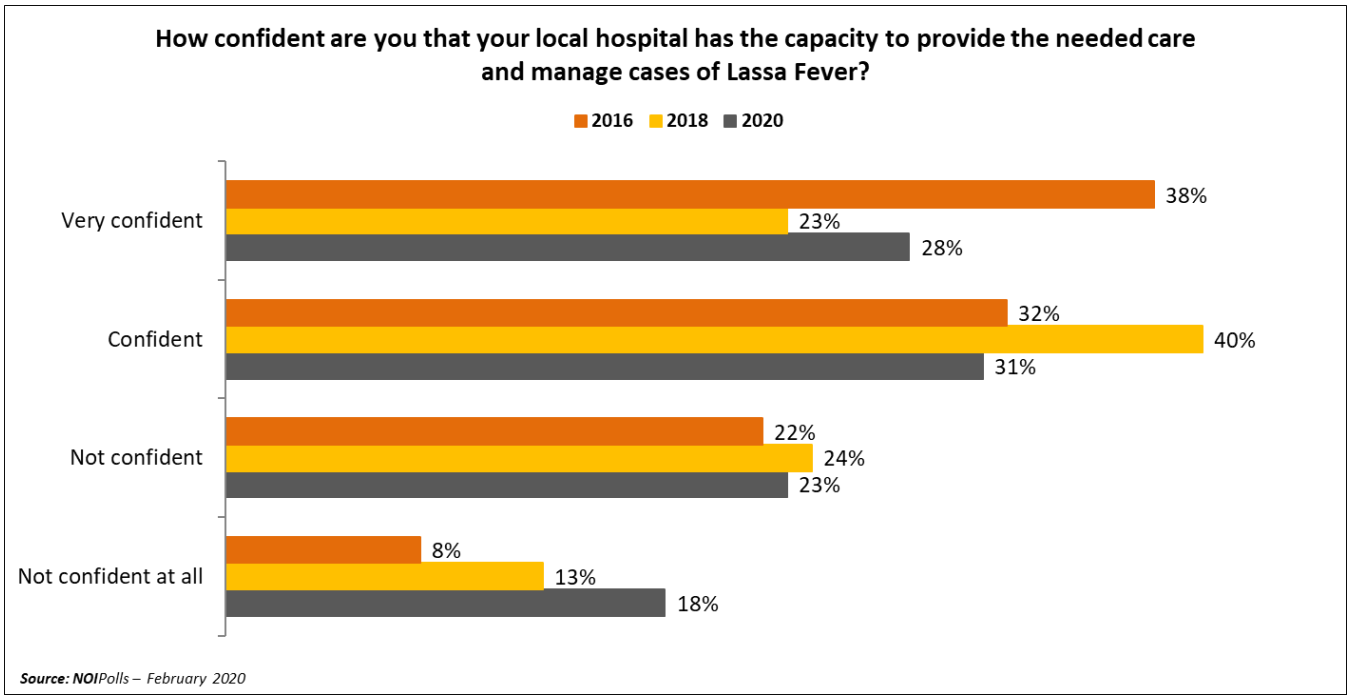

Figure 15: Trend on level of confidence in local hospitals

5.8 Degree Of Sensitization

Findings from the survey revealed that 83 percent of respondents believe that the Ministry of Health carried out enough sensitization on Lassa fever.

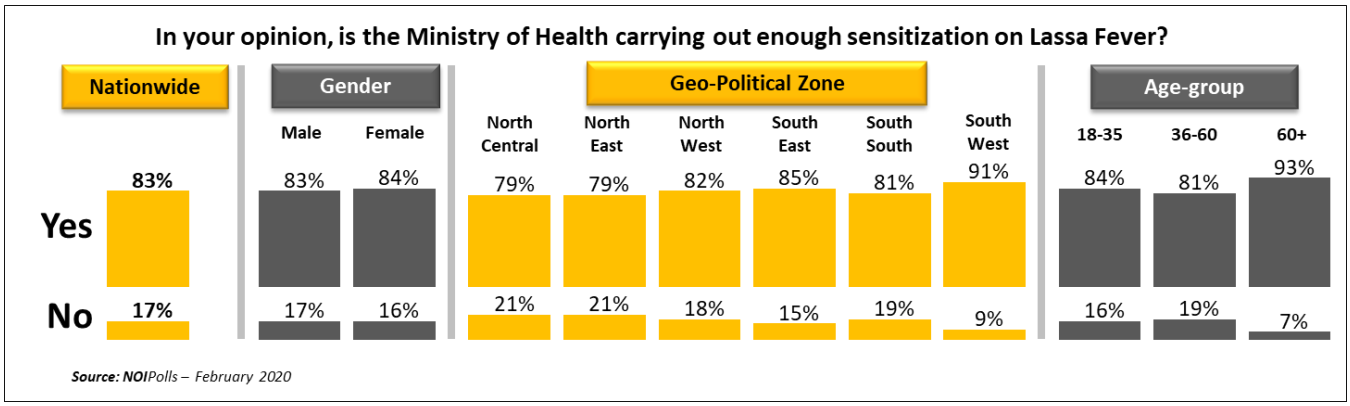

Figure 16: The degree of sensitization

Trend analysis shows that 83 percent of respondents in 2016 believe that the Ministry of Health carried out enough sensitization on Lassa fever. However, that reduced in the 2018 and increased again to 83 percent in the 2020 poll.

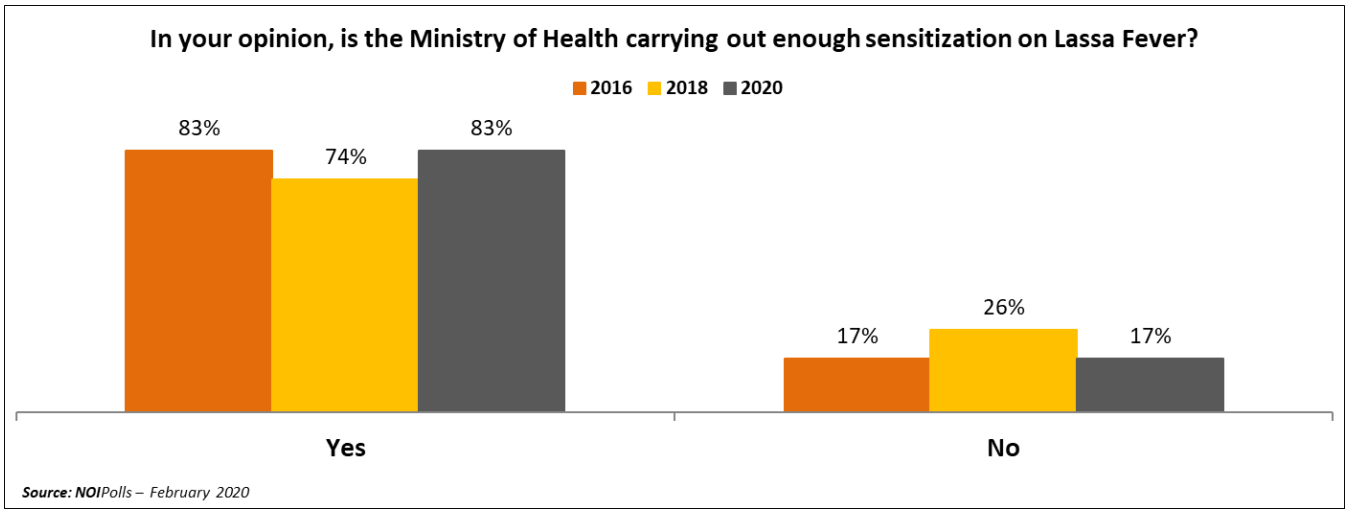

Figure 17: Trend on the degree of sensitization

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the survey has shown that the level of awareness of the outbreak has seen a general 3 percent reduction nationwide. From 1 January through 9 February 2020, 472 laboratory confirmed cases including 70 deaths (case fatality ratio= 14.8 percent) have been reported in 26 out of 36 Nigerian states and the Federal Capital Territory. Of the 472 confirmed cases, 75 percent have been reported from three states: Edo (167 cases), Ondo (156 cases) and Ebonyi (30 cases). The poll findings show that the South-South and south-East zones had lowest level of awareness at 67 percent and 68 percent respectively, despite being amongst the zones with the most cases of Lassa fever.

Furthermore, radio still tops the list as the most common source of information for Lassa fever disease. The Lassa fever 2020 survey results showed that 50 percent of the respondents selected 'radio' as their main channel of awareness. However, every channel of communication must be maximized in order to reach as many people as possible. With the increase in the use of social media and increasing internet penetration, the 2020 poll saw an increase in these platforms by 9 percent.

Although, Lassa fever polls from 2016 through 2018 and 2020 indicate high levels of awareness of Lassa Fever, as well as awareness of modes of transmission and good knowledge of what to do to prevent the disease. However, the underling behavioral issues haven't been addressed. Foodstuff are still dried in the open and people still exhibit poor attitudes to refuse disposal. Perhaps a liaison between health and agencies that improve environmental wellbeing at community levels may drive behavioral change.

Finally, the polls showed about 59 percent confidence in the health care system - 11 percent drop in confidence from 2016 polls. However, respondents demonstrated high levels of willingness to see care at hospitals when infected by the disease. Healthcare workers have been urged to always adopt the test and treat practices especially for malaria and to maintain a high index of suspicion in managing suspected Lassa fever. Further, health workers should also practice adequate infection prevention and control (IPC) measures in managing all patients.