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Authorities Begin Relocation of Kazakh Villagers Hit With Mystery 'Sleep Illness'

By Allison Quinn

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More than 100 of Kalachi's total 680 residents have been affected by the "sleep illness."

Kazakh authorities have begun relocating the residents of a small village that has been plagued for nearly two years by the spread of a mysterious illness marked by random bouts of days-long slumber.

SInce spring 2013, residents of the northern Kazakh villages of Kalachi and neighboring Krasnogorsk have complained of a mysterious "sleeping illness," but health workers have been unable to decisively pin down the cause of the symptoms. Doctors have been referring to the illness as "encephalopathy of unknown etiology," or a brain disorder with no known origin.

Those afflicted fall asleep at random, usually for days at a time, and then suffer from hallucinations and memory loss upon waking, according to Kazakh media reports.

There has been a surge in recent weeks. Since Dec. 20, more than 30 people have fallen ill with the mysterious affliction, prompting authorities to begin relocating residents, Interfax-Kazakhstan reported.

On Wednesday, the regional administration responsible for the village of Kalachi announced that it had handed over the keys of a new apartment to one family so far, and plans to move another 40 families out of the village by the end of January, according to Interfax-Kazakhstan.

More than 100 of Kalachi's total 680 residents have been affected by the illness, and popular speculation has run rampant on its cause, with theories including mass psychosis, poisoning, insect bites, and even an alien invasion.

Last week, the Kazakh Health Ministry said it believed "vapors" that build up during the heating season in poorly ventilated houses could be to blame, Kazakh news site Diapazon.kz reported.

Tests are still being conducted to rule out any possible radiation from a Soviet-era uranium mine in the area, as well as any possible tainted water in the village, according to Diapazon.kz.

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