

Editorial

Dengue Awareness Campaign Crucial for Disease Prevention

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Editor

According to the CDC, almost half of the world's population, about 4 billion people, live in areas with a risk of Dengue.

As Lahore struggles to survive a global pandemic, a nasty epidemic rears its head again, pushing the city's healthcare system to its limits. Dengue virus has begun its yearly round of inflictions, and the exponentially rising number of cases in the city is adding to the anxiety of both the public and healthcare officials.

As the tally crosses 700 and hospitals start filling up with new cases every day, the pressure continues to mount.

Each year upto 400 million infected with Dengue. 100 million people get sick from infection and 40 thousand die from severe dengue. In early stage, symptoms of Dengue and Covid are same.

Healthcare officials from two of Lahore's major public hospitals explain how the local hospitals are preparing to handle the rapidly worsening situation. We have separate units for dengue patients and are ready to take the load. Most patients of dengue fever do not require hospitalisation.

Dengue virus weakens a patient's immune system, thus, making them vulnerable to other infections.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit the country's healthcare system hard. However, the dengue epidemic wasn't unforeseen.

There are several steps that may be taken prior to the start of the dengue 'season' – July through October – before cases begin to pile up. Fumigation is crucial for timely curtailment of the mosquito-borne viral infection.

Vectors of dengue fever are female mosquitoes, mainly of the *Aedes* genus. These can also transmit other viruses such as Zika, yellow fever, and chikungunya. According to a study published in *The Lancet*, 776 cases of the chikungunya viral infection were reported in Pakistan between the years 2016 and 2018. Also, 147,200 dengue virus infections and 800 deaths were reported from 1995 to 2019 in Pakistan alone.

It would be difficult to quote an accurate figure since many dengue-positive patients do not require hospitalization. In most cases, a visit to the OPD (outpatient department) and home care is enough for recovery.

Even though the fumigation protocol and disease prevention have been low on the local government's priorities, the Complete Blood Count (CBC) test for dengue detection remains reasonably priced at Rs. 90 only. Private laboratories in and around Lahore confirm that any patient requiring a CBC test for dengue virus has to pay the minimal charges.

Awareness campaigns are crucial for disease prevention.

The previous government's efforts at managing dengue remain popular. No significant efforts have been made in recent times by the authorities to prevent the spread of dengue infection. At least no fumigation drive has taken place in our area this year.

It appears that too little, too late is the policy adopted by the city administration. At a personal level, if we have done something, it does not count because the community is still largely at risk. The government must identify areas with a history of high concentration of dengue cases and focus on cleanliness drives to reduce the number of infections each year.

Poor waste management and lack of proper water storage facilities in the city could exacerbate the situation. Last year, polio workers regularly visited to ensure that dengue SOPs were followed at household levels.

Urban areas across the country are at risk of infectious diseases. Intestinal infections along with dengue and Covid-19 are also spreading in the city. Overpopulation and poor sanitary conditions are adding to the problem at hand.

Hospital managements are doing everything they can to ensure that patients receive proper care. Failure to do so can lead to serious complications.

The Provincial Health Minister, Dr. Yasmin Rashid, warned the people to remain vigilant as dengue cases could see a spike. You must religiously follow the coronavirus and dengue virus protocols," she declared.

Doctors and pharmacists agree that prevention is better than cure, but in case one contracts dengue virus, they should follow some basic steps to help with recovery. Mild infections can be treated at home. Taking paracetamol to lower fever and keeping oneself hydrated can ease the severity of the symptoms until one fully recovers.