

India faces worst swine flu outbreak in five years, but death rate down

Sanchita Sharma, Hindustan Times, New Delhi Updated: Feb 18, 2015 07:56 IST

India is reeling under the worst swine flu outbreak in half a decade with over 8,000 cases but the dreaded infection has killed far fewer people than in previous years – a fatality rate of just 6.9%, compared to 23.3% last year.

The fall in the number of deaths is because more people are getting diagnosed and hence, being treated for the disease, doctors say. Delhi is the best performing in this regard – with only 6 deaths from nearly 1,500 H1N1 infection cases – showing timely treatment is highly effective.

“More people are getting tested and treated for H1N1. Prescribing the antiviral oseltamivir lowers the viral-load, shortens the duration and severity of symptoms and makes the patient less contagious,” said Dr S N Gaur, head of pulmonary medicine, Patel Chest Institute, Delhi.

Treatment worked for Delhi's Neha Pulkit, 28, who got swine flu in the 28th week of pregnancy. “She developed fever followed by acute breathlessness and was diagnosed with bilateral pneumonia,” said Dr Satish Saluja, senior neonatologist, Ganga Ram Hospital.

The acute breathing problem lowered her blood oxygen saturation levels, which starved the baby of oxygen. Doctors opted for an emergency delivery and she delivered an underweight but healthy baby on January 29,” said Dr Saluja. The baby, who is still in a neonatal ICU, is stable. “Giving her a shot of the vaccine could have prevented the complications,” says Dr Gaur.

Swine flu has claimed 585 victims from 8,423 cases till February 15 – the worst since the pandemic years of 2009-10, when nearly 50,000 people got infected and over 2,700 died. Symptoms include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite, headache and coughing, sore throat, diarrhoea and nausea.

“There is ample stock of oseltamivir, vaccines and N-95 masks for hospitals and diagnostic kits, which have been supplied to the 16 accredited labs across India testing for under Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme,” said a Union health ministry official who did not want to be named.

In states where awareness is lower, deaths are higher. Over the past three days, 100 people have died of the feared infection, with Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh reporting the highest deaths. Bihar has reported no

cases or deaths, which reiterates better surveillance is driving up the number of swine flu cases in states with a good health infrastructure.

All these states have launched massive awareness drives over the past week.

Gujarat government has asked all private hospitals in Ahmedabad and other centres to treat patients. "We have also directed that in all government hospitals OPDs of swine flu patients will remain open 24/7. The government has set up an emergency helpline also." Gujarat health minister Nitin Patel.

Three more patients died of swine flu over the past last 48 hours in Nagpur, taking the death toll in the region to 32 since January 15 this year. "Currently, 35 patients with swine flu are now being treated and blood samples of 36 more have been sent to Indira Gandhi Medical College and hospital. Lab reports are yet to come," said Dr Abhimanyu Niswade, the dean of government-run Medical College and Hospital.

Uttar Pradesh has reported 10 more cases since February 15. In all, 115 of the 388 suspected cases from across 13 districts have tested positive for H1N1 influenza. Till Tuesday, Lucknow alone had 78 cases and three deaths.

Among the worst hit states, Telangana has reported 1,068 positive cases and 46 deaths this year. "The number of positive cases recorded in last six days is 49, 27, 39, 23, 37 and 25 respectively which shows a decrease in swine flu intensity," a senior health official said.

Yet people should continue to take precautions – avoid crowded places and seeking medical attention at the first symptoms of the flu, such as high fever, cough and difficulty breathing.

(with state inputs)

NUMBER OF SWINE FLU DEATHS IN INDIA

	Cases	Deaths	Death Rate
2015 (till Feb 15)	8,423	585	6.9%
2014	937	218	23.3%
2013	5,253	699	13.3%
2012	5,044	405	8%
2011	603	75	12.4%
2010	20,604	1,763	8.6%
2009 (May-Dec)*	27,236	981	3.6%

Source: Ministry of health and family welfare

*Pandemic year when everyone who ever was being tested for H1N1 at identified hospitals



TEN STATES WITH MORE THAN 100 CASES REPORTED THIS YEAR

STATE	CASES	DEATHS
RAJASTHAN	2,568	165
GUJARAT	1,674	144
DELHI	1,477	6
TELANGANA	1,068	46
MAHARASHTRA	442	58
TAMIL NADU	198	8
MADHYA PRADESH	298	76
KARNATAKA	259	17
HARYANA	106	16
UTTAR PRADESH	105	5

Source: Union ministry of health and family welfare

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