



EDITORIAL: INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: DISEASES

DATE: 09.01.2025

HUMAN METAPNEUMOVIRUS (HMPV)

Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is a respiratory virus from the Paramyxoviridae family, which also includes respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and parainfluenza viruses. Identified in 2001, HMPV has been circulating globally for decades. While most infections are mild and self-limiting, the virus poses a significant risk to:

- Elderly individuals.
- Young children, especially under five years.
- Immunocompromised individuals and those with chronic illnesses.

Government's Response to HMPV: A Timely Step

- The Indian government has urged state governments to intensify surveillance for HMPV, recognizing its health implications. The virus resurfaces predominantly in winter and is the second-most prevalent respiratory pathogen among infants in developed countries. However, in India, limited routine laboratory testing has restricted public awareness.
- The recent surge in HMPV-related hospitalizations in China has raised global concern. By promoting precautionary measures such as mask-wearing, maintaining hygiene, and avoiding close contact with symptomatic individuals, the Union Health Ministry aims to address the risks without causing public panic.

Protecting Vulnerable Populations

- The government's targeted approach focuses on safeguarding at-risk groups, including children under five, senior citizens, and individuals with chronic respiratory conditions. Severe impacts are observed in these groups when HMPV progresses to the lower respiratory tract, exacerbating pre-existing conditions like asthma, COPD, and bronchitis.
- Most HMPV cases, however, remain self-limiting and require only symptom management, good nutrition, and adequate hydration for recovery. Awareness and preparedness for these populations are vital to reducing the virus's impact.

Enhancing Disease Surveillance and Preparedness

India's improved respiratory disease monitoring mechanisms, developed post-COVID-19, are pivotal in addressing HMPV. The government's response to influenza outbreaks in Northeast India during



the winter of 2023 demonstrated its vigilance.
Key measures for HMPV management include:

- **Extending surveillance to district levels:** Aligning efforts with WHO protocols.
- **Real-time monitoring and regular updates:** Focusing on vulnerable sections of the population.
- **Integrating the private healthcare sector:** With over 80% of India's healthcare services managed privately, their inclusion is essential for comprehensive monitoring and response. These steps will strengthen India's ability to manage HMPV and other respiratory illnesses effectively.

Present Scenario: Global and National

- Globally, HMPV ranks among the leading causes of respiratory infections, following influenza and RSV. It accounts for 5-10% of respiratory infections in children and vulnerable adults annually.
- In India, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recently identified two HMPV cases in Karnataka involving babies with a history of bronchopneumonia. These cases, detected using PCR diagnostic tools, reflect the first Indian reports of HMPV following a surge in cases in China.

Conclusion

- HMPV is a significant public health challenge, particularly for vulnerable populations. India's proactive approach in enhancing disease surveillance, targeting vulnerable groups, and integrating private healthcare into the monitoring network is commendable. Continued efforts in awareness, preparedness, and robust surveillance will be critical in managing HMPV and similar respiratory threats in the future.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/express-view-on-hmpv-virus-dont-panic-keep-vigil-9767863/>