

Letter to Editor

Tomato Flu - Should Pakistan be Worried?

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Dear Editor,

A new virus has emerged as an endemic in India and due to its highly contagious nature, is of great concern.¹ The population of Kerala is 3.34crores, population growth of 4.91% current decade, contributing to about 2.76% of the total population of India. Making the spread of infections easier.² Tomato flu is a viral infection that predominantly infects children under the age of 5 years. Tomato flu gets its name from red-coloured, tomato-shaped blisters that develop on different parts of the body, similar to those developed during monkeypox infection.¹ Tomato flu presents symptoms like any other viral infection including COVID-19 infection, but it is not associated with SARS-CoV-2.³

The first case of tomato flu was identified on May 6, 2022, in Kollam, Kerala (India). Spread to Anchal, Aryankavu, Neduvathur and Odisha have been reported despite taking necessary precautions.³ It is now reported to be spread to the UK where 2 siblings developed similar rashes after visiting Kerala in May, 2022.⁴ This virus is contagious and spreads via physical contact and infected surfaces. About 82 cases of tomato flu under the age of 5 years have been reported by local government hospitals till July 26, 2022.³

Coxsackie A16 (CA16) and Coxsackie A6 (CA6) are presumed to cause Kerala tomato flu, which are known to cause hand-foot-and-mouth diseases (HFMD).⁴ It is also suggested that the symptoms can be a complication of chikungunya or dengue fever.⁵

Clinical presentation includes fever, fatigue, myalgia, red-coloured bulbous tomato-shaped blisters, dehydration, diarrhoea, irritation, joint swelling, nausea, snee-

zing, running nose, rashes and meningitis.^{1,3,5} Kerala has reported 58 deaths and hospitalizations for food poisoning secondary to tomato flu.¹ Doctors from Singapore reported neurological disorders, polio-like illness, paralysis and pulmonary oedema. As of now there is no treatment for the illness and is managed symptomatically.³

Tomato flu is endemic in India with no specific treatment or vaccine. Prevention measures similar to COVID infection must be adopted, including isolation, hand hygiene, sanitization and prevention of fomite exchange. Pakistan is a neighbouring country and no travel restrictions, should be cautions about this virus. Medical campaigns and awareness programs regarding preventive measures should be held. Travel restrictions, mass screening with isolation measures should be implemented. Hospitals, health care centres and the system must be equipped and ready to handle the pandemic. Even though the disease is said to be non-fatal and curable, it can still burden the health care system.^{1,3,5}

References:

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