

The Alarming Dengue Situation in Bangladesh 2023: Urgent Measures Needed

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Introduction

Dengue fever, a mosquito-borne viral infection, has become a major public health concern in Bangladesh. The country has been grappling with an alarming rise in dengue cases in recent years, with a significant increase observed during the monsoon season. The severity of the issue demands immediate action from both the government and citizens to prevent further spread and manage the crisis effectively. Although dengue is endemic in Bangladesh, the current dengue surge is unusual in terms of seasonality and the early sharp increase in comparison to previous years, where the surge started around late June¹. The consequences of this dengue outbreak are far-reaching and detrimental. The loss of human lives, specifically children and the elderly, is traumatic and devastating for families and communities. Moreover, the economic burden cannot be overlooked, as the cost of providing healthcare and treatment to affected individuals is escalating exponentially.

A Sharp Surge in Dengue Cases

Bangladesh has experienced multiple dengue outbreaks since the first epidemic occurred in 2000. However, the situation has worsened significantly in recent years due to various factors, including climate change, rapid urbanization, and unplanned urban development. In 2019, the country witnessed one of its worst dengue outbreaks, with over 101,000 confirmed cases and 179 fatalities reported². Similarly, in 2020, around 50,000 individuals were infected with dengue, leaving many struggling to find proper medical care. In 2022, over 60,000 confirmed cases with 281 reported deaths³. Till

date (10 October, 2023) Bangladesh experienced 228,779 reported cases and 1109 reported fatalities with the highest death rate in last 23 years³.

Challenges in Battling Dengue

Several challenges contribute to the severity of the dengue situation in Bangladesh:

1. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure: The country's healthcare system is already overwhelmed by various diseases and lack of resources. The surge in dengue cases puts immense pressure on hospitals, resulting in shortages of beds, medications, and experienced medical personnel.
2. Lack of awareness and preventive measures: Despite efforts to educate the public about dengue prevention, many Bangladeshis are still unaware of the risks and precautionary measures. Neglecting measures such as removing stagnant water and using mosquito repellants contributes to the breeding and proliferation of dengue-carrying mosquitoes.
3. Urbanization and unplanned construction: Uncontrolled urbanization and poor urban planning contribute to the creation of breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Increased construction means stagnant water is often left unnoticed, providing an ideal environment for mosquito breeding.
4. Climate change: Rising temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns due to climate change further fuel the dengue outbreak. Mosquitoes thrive in warm and humid conditions, leading to longer breeding seasons and increased transmission rates.

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Urgent Measures Needed

To combat the dengue crisis, Bangladesh needs immediate intervention at both the individual and governmental level:

1. **Government initiatives:** The government should allocate more funds towards health infrastructure development, including increased hospital capacity, trained medical personnel, and provision of necessary medical supplies for dengue treatment. Additionally, comprehensive national campaigns should be launched to raise awareness about dengue prevention and control measures.
2. **Strengthening public health measures:** Improving urban planning, enforcing building regulations, and conducting regular inspections to identify and eliminate mosquito breeding grounds are crucial for controlling the spread of dengue. Furthermore, strengthening vector control programs, such as widespread fumigation and distribution of bed nets, can aid in reducing mosquito populations.
3. **Public collaboration and awareness:** Citizens must actively participate in dengue prevention efforts. The public should practice proper waste management, eliminate stagnant water sources, and use mosquito repellants and bed nets. Schools, colleges, and community organizations should prioritize dengue awareness programs to educate students and disseminate preventive practices.
4. **Timely Surveillance and Reporting:** Establishing a robust surveillance system to timely detect and report dengue cases, enabling timely and targeted responses to affected areas. This would involve training healthcare professionals, enhancing laboratory testing capacity, and ensuring accurate and transparent data collection at all levels.

5. **Strengthening Research and Development:** Encouraging research institutions and academia to focus on dengue-related studies, including vaccine development, improved diagnostic methods, and more effective treatment options.

All the above measures could be possible only by integrated effort from concerned ministries of the government of Bangladesh.

Conclusion:

Time is of the essence. The escalating dengue situation in Bangladesh demands immediate and concerted action from all stakeholders involved. The government, NGO's, healthcare professionals, communities at large, and individuals must actively collaborate to control the spread of dengue, raise awareness about preventive measures, and ensure access to proper healthcare. Only through collective efforts can Bangladesh safeguard its population against the devastating impact of dengue fever.

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