Nipah Virus: Everything about the Virus that's Taking Lives in Kerala!

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Abstract

Kerala has been on high alert due to mysterious deaths of peoples because of an unidentified viral attack. Out of these, three were reported to be caused by Nipah Virus (NiV). As per the National Institute of Virology, Pune, Nipah Virus is the sole cause of these three deaths. The Nipah virus (NiV) has claimed ten lives, including a nurse who left a heartbreaking note to her family, in Kerala. Around two more have been confirmed to have contracted the disease, and 40 others have been quarantined. An unheard virus, NiV is yet to be understood by many. Here is what the virus is all about.

Keywords: Nipahvirus; Virology; Quarantine; Transmission; Infection.

Introduction

A newly emerging zoonosis infection Nipah virus (NiV) which causes severe disease affecting both animals and humans. Fruit bats are the natural host for this virus that belongs to Pteropodidae Family, Pteropus genus [1].

Incidence

In 1998, Kampung Sungai Nipah, Malaysia, NiV was first identified during an outbreak of disease. During that incidence, pigs were the intermediate hosts. Later, in subsequent NiV outbreak, no other intermediate hosts was reported. In India, the first outbreak occured in the state of West Bengal and fruit bats was identified as solely hosts. Human-to-human transmission has also been documented, including in a hospital setting in India [1]. In Bangladesh in 2004, humans became infected with NiV as a result of consuming date palm sap that had been contaminated by infected fruit bats.

Incubation

The incubation period for Nipha virus is about 5 to 14 days and symptoms will be visible after this period.

Mode of Transmission

Consuming partially-eaten fruits by bats those are infected and partially-cooked meat of infected animals can also trigger the virus. Drinking juices like date palm sap, toddy, juice can also cause the infection [2] the virus spreads directly from human-to-human by close contact with people's secretions and excretions.

Signs and Symptoms

The symptom is usually asymptomatic and the infection may leads to even acute respiratory syndrome and fatal encephalitis.

The symptoms of Nipah Virus are
- Fever,
- sore throat,
- severe headache
- confusion,
- disorientation,
- nausea,
- persistent drowsiness
- stomach pain,
- muscle pain (myalgia),
- vomiting,
- fatigue and
- blurred vision
It may also leads to coma in 24-48 hours. These symptoms can last up to 7-10 days.
**Prevention**

Non-vaccination efforts will perhaps play an important role in controlling NiV disease. Prevention is better than cure.

- Regular handwashing with soap
- Have a safe protected physical contact with infected people
- Consuming partly eaten fruits or unpasteurized fruit juices to be avoided
- Pet animals to be protected
- Boil and eat freshly collected date palm juice
- Wash and peel fruits before consuming
- Maintain personal hygiene
- Wash, peel and cook all fruit thoroughly before eating
- Households should be covered properly
- Use NH 95-grade and higher masks [2]

While transporting the dead body of the person after death contracting Nipah fever, cover the person’s face. relatives should try refrain from hugging or kissing the dead person and should take utmost care while bathing the body before cremation or burial.

**Treatment**

Must watch out for respiratory illness during the early stages [3]. Currently, no drug available for humans or animals. Intensive supportive care for people suffering from severe respiratory and neurologic complications [2]. Tackling risk factors may be more effective than vaccines themselves.

**Vaccination**

Vaccine has been on trail by WHO. The vaccine in form of recombinant sub-unit formulation has proven successful in (animals) cats. Canarypox vectored Nipah F and G vaccine has appeared promising for preventing infection in swine and also has potential vaccine for humans.

**Why are Bats Suddenly Turning Dangerous?**

As per the WHO, “There is always a strong evidence that emergence of bat-related viral infection communicable to humans and animals has been due to the inavailability of natural habitats of bats. Because of human activity, the flying fox habitat is destroyed, bats become stressed and hungry, their immune system gets weaker, their viral load goes up and a lot of virus spills out in their urine and saliva.” This proves that ultimately, what is at blame is human activity only.

**Conclusion**

Over the last two decades, research has provided insight into the mechanisms of pathogenesis and transmission of NiV. The advancement of this understanding, and, more importantly, practical
applications of it in the form of vaccines for NiV entering human clinical trials, prevention of infection through modifying risk factors and in the development of therapeutics and techniques capable of treating infected patients to reduce morbidity and mortality in the forthcoming decades.

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