

2023: Alarming Rise of Dengue in Bangladesh Needs Urgent Multisectoral Action

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Previously dengue was considered as a seasonal disease in Bangladesh. Because, most of the cases being recorded during the monsoon. But now cases are being reported throughout the year. In 2022, majority cases of the dengue infections were reported in the second half of the year, with over 50 percent of total cases reported in October. This means that if we cannot contain the spread of the virus right now, we may experience another deadly outbreak in the later part of the year. The situation seems quite dire already with the number of cases being recorded. The presence of four distinct serotypes of the dengue virus – DENV-1, DENV-2, DENV-3 and DENV-4 – in our country may also increase the severity of the infections. Therefore, we have no time to waste and must take urgent multisectoral action to control the severity of dengue in our country this year.¹

With each passing day, the dengue situation in the country is getting worse. In May 2023, the number of dengue patients was 1,036, which is five times higher than the same month in 2019. In 2022, when the highest number of people died from the dengue outbreak, there were 163 cases in May. In 18 July 2023, the country has already recorded 127 fatalities (female - 73; male - 54) from the mosquito-borne disease, a staggering five times higher than the 2022. The continuous increasing number of reported cases points to a possibly deadly situation looming on the horizon. Dengue has already spread to all the district in the country. But the authorities do not seem like they have taken any preparations in this regard. So far, no notable action was taken by the two city corporations of the capital, such as preventing water logging, people aware – in advance to prevent dengue outbreak. Our experts' call to all relevant

organizations, including city corporations, municipalities and Union Parishads, to play a strong role in controlling the disease also seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Such systematic failure is unacceptable during such deadly situation.^{1,2}

Now, this is the high time, the authorities should immediately identify the dengue hotspots across the country, start conducting regular anti-mosquito drives, prevent water logging, destroy all possible dengue breeding grounds and conduct regular awareness campaigns. Engaging all sectors of the communities with their work is crucial here. A robust dengue surveillance system must be built to record the actual number of dengue cases in the country, without which making proper interventions is not possible.²

There is a lot more that needs to be done at this moment, but what's most crucial is that the government, city corporations, health authorities and citizens all come together in the fight against dengue. It is time for proactive, sustained, and integrated efforts to prevent further spread of the infection and keep it contained in the future. An integrated vector management system must be established by the government which includes round-the-year monitoring of *Aedes* mosquitoes and sentinel surveillance. Despite frequent urgings by national and international experts, the formulation of a national vector control policy has been delayed for far too long. The government must expedite the approval of the policy and ensure its proper implementation as early as possible. Now, what we need to do urgently is to declare the dengue situation of our country a public health emergency. This will send a proper message to the people, but

should also allow for a better mobilization of resources, policy alignments, central coordination and last but not the least a quick and unified response. Waiting for the situation to worsen further before acknowledging its gravity can have severe disastrous as well as fatal consequences.^{3,4}

References

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