

The CIWEC Hospital Health News

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Dengue Fever

Dengue fever is the most common febrile illness in the world with more than 5 million cases reported to the WHO in the year 2025. It is a disease of the tropics and subtropics caused by any one of the four serotypes of the virus transmitted by day-biting aedes mosquitoes. Nepal had a large dengue outbreak in 2022 with smaller outbreaks in subsequent years. The aedes mosquitoes carrying dengue are mostly confined to urban areas where they breed in the relatively clean water found in storage containers, discarded tyres and tin cans. Once bitten by an infective mosquito a person will become sick within two to eight days.

The disease is characterized by sudden onset of high fever, pain behind the eyes, headache, backache, joint and muscle aches and marked fatigue. It is often accompanied by a rash that looks like a red flush on the back, chest and abdomen. Fever returns to normal within a week. A small number of patients with dengue will develop dengue with warning signs or severe disease who will need to be hospitalized for supportive treatment. No specific treatment is available and spontaneous recovery is the rule for most persons.

Criteria for severe dengue as defined by the WHO are: fluid accumulation in the lungs with respiratory distress, severe bleeding and severe organ impairment, such as hepatitis, impaired consciousness, or heart impairment. There is another category called dengue with warning signs which includes patients with: A). Abdominal pain, B). Persistent vomiting, defined as more than three episodes in 12 hours C). Fluid accumulation, such as pleural effusion or ascites D). Mucosal bleeding, such as bleeding gums or conjunctiva, epistaxis, vaginal bleeding, hemoptysis, or hematuria E). Lethargy or restlessness.

Since no specific treatment is available, focus is on prevention. Most important aspect of prevention is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes, by covering up where practical, and by the use of insect repellent DEET in 30% strength or Picaridin 20%. Odomos cream available in Nepal and India can be equally effective. Staying inside screened/air-conditioned accommodation is an effective way to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. The currently available dengue vaccine is Qdenga® that can be used in persons 4 years and older without confirming prior dengue infection. This vaccine is currently approved in the European Union, UK and several countries across the globe. It has received WHO prequalification in May 2024. This vaccine is not licensed in Nepal at present.

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