Press Release

Swine flu resurfaces in India

103 deaths reported in Pune, Nashik, Ahmedabad and 160 nationally in the past three months; prevention through hygienic practices is key according to experts

New Delhi, 12 April 2017: The first three months of the year 2017 have already seen a four-fold increase in swine flu deaths across Maharashtra. Between January 1 and April 10, more than 100 deaths have been recorded compared to a total of 25 in 2016, in major cities in the country. According to experts, 7,581 suspected cases have been reported and more than 23,000 people have been vaccinated against the H1N1 influenza.

A respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses, swine flu infects the respiratory tract leading to barking cough, decreased appetite, and nasal secretions. It can be transmitted easily through the air, skin, saliva, and contaminated surfaces. Among other reasons, experts have attributed this sudden surge in swine flu cases due to the huge difference in day and night temperatures over the last few days. Viruses thrive in environments where there is a large difference between the minimum and maximum day temperatures.

Speaking about the outbreak, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement said, "Swine flu is a respiratory illness that originated in pigs. However, it is now a human disease that spreads by coughing and sneezing. The symptoms resemble those in a seasonal flu such as fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, and chills. Occasionally, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and rash may also be present. Pregnant women, children under five, elderly and those with serious medical conditions are most vulnerable to this disease. Only sore throat is not a sign of swine flu. Patients with normal flu don't require antibiotics. However, severe breathlessness and blood on coughing are ominous signs and need investigation and/or hospitalization. The symptoms usually last for 1 to 2 weeks."

Respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette, and hand hygiene are the three aspects of prevention from swine flu. Respiratory hygiene involves maintaining a distance of at least 3 feet from the person who is coughing and sneezing. Cough etiquettes involve covering the mouth and nose with a tissue while coughing and sneezing and disposing off the used tissue in a waste basket. Hand hygiene is a very critical aspect of prevention from this disease. Hand hygiene involves washing hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rubs. As per a survey conducted by Heart Care Foundation of India, involving 63 schools both public and government, with 6047 students (2817 Girls and 3230 Boys), 76% of the students (4576) were not aware of the role that cough etiquettes play in the prevention of flu.
"Some of the same antiviral drugs that are used to treat seasonal flu also work against H1N1 swine flu. Oseltamivir (Tamiflu), peramivir (Rapivab), and zanamivir (Relenza) seem to work best. Influenza vaccines can prevent flu caused by human strains, which is recommended for children above 6 months; adults over 50 years of age; patients with pulmonary, cardiovascular, renal, hepatic, neurologic, hematologic disorders, and diabetes mellitus; and pregnant females and health care providers. The inactivated vaccine can be given to the above groups. The live attenuated influenza vaccine (intranasal spray) can be given only to persons aged 2 to 49 years (not to pregnant females)," Dr Aggarwal added.

Doctors also advise against self-medication. As the symptoms of swine flu can overlap with other viral infections, it is imperative to visit a health facility for correct diagnosis before any treatment options are considered.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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