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## Now, it's raining diseases

The monsoon brings with it cases of cholera, dengue, typhoid and malaria

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Times News Network

**W**ith the boon, comes the bane. And this is proving to be another monsoon of discontent on the health front. Whether it is cholera, dengue, typhoid or malaria, the Capital has become prone to all kinds of diseases.

The facts speak for themselves. At the last count, Delhi had already recorded 34 cases of malaria, 38 cases of typhoid, and 61 cases of cholera. Worse still, dengue has staged a comeback.

"We have convened a meeting—involving the MCD, the NDMC, the DJB, the DDA, the PWD, and the departments of irrigation and floods—to decide on steps to counter water and vector-borne diseases such as dengue and cholera," offers Delhi health minister AK Walia.

Meanwhile, principal secretary (health) SP Aggarwal maintains that steps are being tak-



### HEALTH WATCH

- Malaria: 34
- Typhoid: 38
- Dengue: 2
- Cholera: 61

(Figures for July)

en to deal with the situation. "Dengue apart, we are concerned about other monsoon-related diseases such as cholera and typhoid."

But the official assurances notwithstanding, the medical men are worried. And not without reason. "Children are specially susceptible to viral fever, typhoid and gastroenteritis—all of which are associated with the monsoon. There should be preventive measures in place to check the spread of these ailments," points out Anupam Sibal, paediatrician at Apollo Hospital.

The *sarkar*, on its part, claims to have directed the DJB not to supply water from shallow pumps, apart from supplying it with chlorine tablets.

Words of comfort no doubt, but it might prove to be too little, too late. Meanwhile, whatever be the reason, the city is bed-ridden this season. And that's a bitter pill to swallow.

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# HT HEALTH

## All fevers aren't dengue



THE OBVIOUS FIRST: Throat infection continues to be the commonest cause of fever in young children

**Y**OUR CHILD gets fever and your blood pressure shoots up. You wonder if it's dengue and rush to a doctor demanding a platelet count. The platelet count is lower than expected, and your blood pressure goes up further. Is it dengue, or just another bout of the ubiquitous upper respiratory tract or gastrointestinal infections that surface each year when the weather changes?

"Dengue has got people in a panic and the family often insists on a platelet count to reassure themselves. In most cases, illnesses other than dengue may also result in the platelet count falling. That's why most doctors still go by the clinical symptoms accompanying the fever to make a diagnosis," says Dr Anupam Sibal, senior consultant (paediatrics), Apollo Hospital.

Experts say you should look for what doctors call "localising symptoms" that indicate the underlying cause of the fever (see box). Since these illnesses are caused by viruses, the disease is self-limiting and takes about five days to a week to subside. There is no need for treatment, certainly not antibiotics. The symptoms can be treated to make the patient feel comfortable, and may include paracetamol to bring down the fever or an oral rehydration solution to counter a stomach infection.

Some doctors, however, want to play safe and insist on regular tests to measure the platelet count even if the symptoms indicate otherwise. "My daughter had high fever and a cough and the doctor insisted we get her platelet count taken every day for a week so that he could track the fever," says Neelam Pant, 36, a teacher at DAV Public School.

More than the money, Pant is upset that the experience has turned her nine-year-old off doctors. "She could see the tension we underwent as we waited for the test result each day and after the third day, did not want to go for the blood tests," she recalls. Agrees Dr Sibal: "Unnecessary tests traumatise the child and should be avoided. These tests are needed only if the viral is non-specific and the symptoms indicate dengue."

Still, the fear persists and at times the family insists on hospitalisation even when there is no need for it. "Dengue cases are far more than reported by the MCD and we get so many patients with symptoms of high fever, pain behind the eyes, bodyache and rash that we had to convert our paediatric single rooms into double rooms," he adds.

Even if it's dengue, there is no need for it. "Dengue cases are far more than reported by the MCD and we get so many patients with symptoms of high fever, pain behind the eyes, bodyache and rash that we had to convert our paediatric single rooms into double rooms," he adds.

Your child needs a doctor only if he is bleeding or looking sick after a bout of fever, relax. It was probably just another encounter with the common cold.

Since the platelet count and the total white blood cells (WBC) go down because of other viral infections as well, parents need not take lower than normal counts as a surefire indication of dengue. "We consider a transfusion from the gums, mouth or nose only if the child starts bleeding platelets go as low as 15,000. In most cases, the counts come up to normal on their own," says Dr Taneja.

Dr Taneja, chief of paediatrics, Max Healthcare. Better on its own," says Dr Arvind Taneja, chief of paediatrics, Max Healthcare.

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### Clearing the fevered air

Look for 'localising symptoms' that indicate the underlying cause of the fever. A cough, runny or blocked nose and a sore throat indicate an upper respiratory tract infection, while diarrhoea, vomiting and stomachache are symptoms of a gastrointestinal infection (GI).

#### Dengue

- High fever, over 103 degrees
- Severe headache
- Severe body and joints pain
- Pain behind the eyes
- Rash, itching in the body
- Muscular weakness

#### Other viral fevers

- Fever
- Cough
- Nausea, vomiting in GIs
- Stomach cramps
- Runny nose, nasal congestion
- Bodyache

NYT

## Natural protection clues in these times of flu

Sanchita Sharma  
New Delhi, December 24

**I**F YOU are a party animal, you need more than good cheer to survive the New Year. First the Delhi fog,

the winter chill and your hosts' new-fangled conversion to organic vegetables and unspiked juices conspire to keep you home. And just as you resign yourself to spending long evenings chatting with friends or family, burning eyes and a runny nose rule out all plans to mingle.

Is it flu and am I at risk, you ask. Do I need a flu vaccine? Experts say you don't. "The influenza virus mutates very fast and the vaccine has to be modified every year to be effective. We don't even know whether the international vaccine works for the Indian strains," says Dr J.N. Pande, senior consultant, medicine, Sitaram Bharata Institute and Research Centre.

The flu vaccine offers protection for only a year and so you have to get vaccinated every year, which makes it an expensive proposition.

Most people don't even know which virus is causing their current bout of infection. "Most people loosely term symptoms of a cold as 'flu' even when the virus causing the infection belongs to a family other than influenza, such as the coronavirus," says Dr Anupam Sibal, senior consultant, paediatrics at Apollo Hospital.

"Unless your physician feels otherwise, the vaccine is not recommended as routine as only two sub-groups are at risk: people over 65 years, with a dysfunctional immune system, chronic respiratory problems, and secondly, very young children," he adds.

"This doesn't mean you should sit back and wait for a virus to keep you from having a good time. "Eating healthy food will give you the energy needed to survive partying," says Shikha Khanna, chief dietician, Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. "Focus on the vari-



**BEAT VIRUS:** Rather than vaccines, eating healthy helps beat flu

ous food groups — grain, fruit and vegetables and animal protein — and eat as wide a variety of fruit and vegetables as possible," she adds.

Since animal products are a rich source of protein, calcium, iron, zinc, and vitamins A, D and B12, vegetarians should ensure they're getting enough of these from plant sources.

"It's best to go for supplements that are balanced and not high in one particular vitamin, but whatever the combination, make sure you take them after meals to maximise absorption, make sure you take

absorption," says Dr Shalini Chibber, general physician. Minerals are essential, so look for chromium, copper, magnesium, zinc, and iron, especially if you're a woman as over one in two makes them listless and tired. You need to take multivitamins twice a day if you are on antibiotics, but if you are healthy, having them once a day is more than enough to help you fight winter infections. They are best had with food to maximise absorption, says Chibber.

### Vital allowances

- ▶ **Vitamin A:** Take it in combined form as too much can cause liver damage. The recommended daily allowance (RDA) is 900 microgram (mg) for men, 700 for women.
- ▶ **Vitamin C:** While the RDA for vitamin C is 75 mg per day, smokers should take more.
- ▶ **Vitamin E:** Should be taken as d-alpha-tocopherol, its most biologically active form. The RDA is 15 mg.
- ▶ **Vitamin B6:** Recommended amount is 1.3 mg per day for adults, but women on contraceptive pills need more as the pill causes depletion.
- ▶ **Folate:** A must for women in the childbearing age, folic acid or folacin prevents anaemia and foetal damage. The RDA is 400 microgram.
- ▶ **B12:** Found in animal products, nuts and fermented food, vitamin B12 supplementation is essential for vegetarians. The RDA is 2.4 mg.
- ▶ **Calcium:** The RDA for adults is 1,000 mg, and 1,200 mg for women over 50 years.
- ▶ **Iron:** The RDA is 8 mg for men and post-menopausal women. Premenopausal women need 18 mg, and pregnant women 27 milligrams.
- ▶ **Iron:** Iron from eggs, whole grains, green vegetables, legumes and nuts is not as easily absorbed as that from meats. Have it with vitamin C (orange juice, nimbu paani) to boost its absorption.
- ▶ **Zinc:** It is needed for men and 8 for women. Increase its intake from nuts, beans, dairy products and meats.