

Dengue in Malad

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S Ward (Bhandup, 487 cases), but doctors in Malad said the number of dengue patients in the suburb would "easily cross 700".

Doctors have said that such statistical discrepancy is a result of the BMC's insistence on considering only the cases confirmed through ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) testing procedure.

A doctor, who consults at five hospitals in Malad, told Mumbai Mirror, "The most common test to detect dengue is the NS1 antigen, which is called the non-structural protein 1 test. The BMC rejects findings of the NS1 tests saying they are inaccurate, and instead rely on machine-based ELISA."

The doctor added that there were "less than 10% chances of NS1 antigen showing inaccurate results, whereas in ELISA, chances of inaccurate result were around 2%".

"Test results, whether obtained through NS1 antigen or ELISA, are correlated with a drop in platelets and white blood cells count. In every positive case under the NS1 antigen procedure, doctors start the treatment immediately, because all of them report all the symptoms. Under the ELISA procedure, the results come out around 36 hours after contracting the virus, and at times on the fifth or the seventh day," the doctor said.

Another private medical practitioner said the BMC was making a "blunder" in not considering the NS1 antigen test results because a large number of dengue patients were from the economically poor background who wouldn't give consent for a more expensive ELISA procedure.

"The ELISA tests cost Rs 600, and if there's a negative result despite the symptoms, it has to be repeated, whereas the NS1 antigen procedure costs a lot less. In Mumbai, a majority of the patients refuse ELISA as soon as the NS1 antigen test shows they have dengue. If the NS1 test is positive and the patient has all the symptoms of dengue, there is no reason for the BMC to not consider them as dengue cases," the doctor said.

The doctor pointed out that as per the BMC records, Malad reported six confirmed dengue cases in September. "Sanjeevani Hospital alone reported four confirmed cases last month. How is it that the rest of the hospitals and clinics in the suburbs reported only two other cases?" the doctor asked.

The hospital authorities and doctors also allege "harassment" by the BMC if they talk about dengue cases in the media. "The civic officials said they didn't want 'unnecessary hype' about dengue. Whenever these cases are reported in the media, the very next day we are visited by a team of official officials who are hell bent to prove our diagnosis was wrong. The BMC targets those who talk about the cases instead of getting to the root cause," a doctor said.

The BMC categorically rejected claims of underreporting dengue or any other cases. The BMC's executive health officer, Dr Padmaja Keskar, said, "There are two tests to determine dengue, and they are NS1 and ELISA.



Manohar Gupta, 19, Resident of Khot Kua Road

"I suffered from high fever for several days, followed by severe body ache and weakness. My reports came positive for dengue following an NS1 test," he said. His father Parvesh added, "His platelets had dropped to 58,000 and doctors said that all symptoms pointed to dengue."



Ishan Khan, 7, Resident of Pathanwadi

Ishan Khan's platelets dropped to 33,000. While minors are at a high risk due to low immunity, in Ishan's case, dengue was detected within four days of developing fever. "We first took him to a local physician and then to Gokuldham medical centre. He had to be admitted for a week," Ishan's father Shahdab said, adding that gradually his platelet levels increased and he was discharged a week ago.



Pratik Simalkar, 26, Resident of Raheja Township

An employee with a logistics firm, Pratik Simalkar developed high fever last month. "A blood test revealed that I had contracted dengue," Simalkar, whose platelets had dropped to 80,000, said. "I got admitted to a local hospital, where I was treated for 10 days," he said.



Rinku Yadav, 36, Resident of Tanaji Nagar

Rinku Yadav took treatment from a local physician for four days but her condition deteriorated and she was hospitalised recently. "My platelet count had dropped to 20,000," said Yadav, who works at a private firm, and was confirmed to be a dengue patient through an ELISA test. According to Yadav, who lives in Tanaji Nagar, Kurar, many of her neighbours were also suffering from dengue.

Although we treat all NS1 positive patients with equal care, they are not confirmed cases unless they test positive as per the ELISA procedure. Otherwise, it's a false positive case. If all such suspected cases are also declared to the public, it will create panic," Keskar said.

Anuradha Pednekar, member of the BMC's Health Committee, said private hospitals were to be blamed for the problem. "Despite it being mandatory, all private hospitals don't report dengue cases to the civic body. While some give a data daily as

expected, a few others provide it only a weekly basis. There is a tremendous lack of awareness among people. Our BMC hospitals have an SOP in place to treat dengue. Despite that, people only come to civic hospitals at the last minute," Pednekar said.

According to the BMC, G-South Ward (Lower Parel-Worli) reported most number of confirmed dengue cases this year (98), followed by F-North (Matunga, 96) and G-North (Dadar, 91) wards.

However, doctors in Malad said that till last week, almost all private

hospitals in the suburb were flooded with dengue patients. "We had to convince many patients that dengue can be managed by staying at home as well. There is not always a need of hospitalisation. But those patients who have insurance and those who very paranoid insisted on hospitalisation," a doctor who practices in one of these hospitals said.

Malad-based physician Dr Mehul Bhatt said that he has been treating, on an average, two patients diagnosed with dengue every day for the last several weeks.