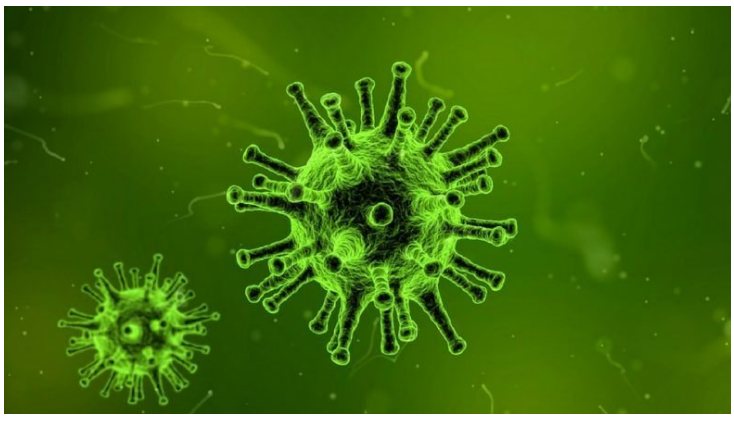
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India seeks Australiaâ??s help to combat Nipah virus

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Meanwhile, there are reports of dead bats being found on the premises of a government school in Himachal Pradesh, samples of which have been sent for testing to NIV, Pune, to ascertain the reason behind their deaths.



In the wake of Nipah virus cases in Kerala, the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has written to the Queensland government in Australia asking it to provide an antibody developed there to test if it can "neutralise" the virus in humans.

The antibody has not been tested on humans so far.

"We have asked them to give their monoclonal antibody for conducting a test in India to find out if it can neutralise the Nipah virus in humans.

"In Australia, it has only been tried in vitro (happening outside the body in artificial conditions, often in a test tube) and has been found to be effective. But it has not been tested on humans," said ICMR Director General, Dr Balram Bhargava, while clarifying that it will not lead to creation of vaccine.

ICMR is the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.

"We are preparing a dossier on what will be methodology and what would be the regulatory process so that we can fast track the process," he said.

According to Dr Bhargava, Australia is ready to share as it will help generate data on the efficacy of the antibody.

"It is not yet sure how much it will be effective," he said, adding the infection caused by Nipah virus has a high mortality rate (50-70 pc).

According to National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme, the drug ribavirin has been shown to be effective against the viruses in vitro, but human investigations to date have been inconclusive and the clinical usefulness of the drug remains uncertain.

The death toll due to outbreak of Nipah virus rose to 12 in the southern state of Kerala, with one more person succumbing to the deadly virus in Kozhikode this morning, said a Health ministry official.

Meanwhile, there are reports of dead bats being found on the premises of a government school in Himachal Pradesh, samples of which have been sent for testing to NIV, Pune, to ascertain the reason behind their deaths.

According to the health ministry officials, of the 12 deaths in Kerala so far due to the virus, nine people died in Kozhikode district and three in Mallappuram. Besides, about 160 samples have been sent for testing at the virology institute.

While 18 people with specific symptoms are admitted at hospitals in Kozhikode, 22 patients with suspected Nipah cases, all from Malappuram district, are admitted at Kozhikode Medical College for observation.

"They are all contacts of the confirmed cases and their lab results are awaited. Also, 95 families are under surveillance," a health ministry official said.

Nipah virus (NiV) infection is a newly emerging zoonosis that causes severe disease in both animals and humans. The natural host of the virus are fruit bats of the Pteropodidae Family, Pteropus genus.

Currently, there is no vaccine or drug for the treatment of the NiV infection. The treatment for human cases is supportive and management treatment along with intensive supportive care.

The virus spreads through close contact with people's secretions and excretions. Eating food which may have the droplets of saliva and urine of infected bats can lead to the transmission of the virus.

Earlier, cases of Nipah virus were reported from Siliguri in 2001 and Nadia in 2007 in West Bengal and around 47 deaths were reported.