Nipah Virus Panic in Kerala

What is the issue?

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- The lethal Nipah Virus has been spreading in northern Kerala, creating a health emergency and widespread panic.
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- The Zoonotic virus is suspected to have spread to humans from infected bats, and actions to curtail the spread of infections are currently underway.
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How is the current episode panning out?

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- Nipah spreads from fruit bats to humans and other animals, mainly through bad dropping or bodily remains and then spreads laterally within a species.
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- But less than 1% of the fruit bats are estimated be infected with Nipah virus and it is even rarer for it to infect humans.
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- It is indeed highly contagious within humans, and the current episode in Kerala even killed a nurse who was treating another Nipah patient.
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- The outbreak has already cost the lives of 10 people out of 12 confirmed cases in Kozhikode and Malappuram of Kerala.
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- Notably, the previous serious outbreak in India was in 2001, when the Siliguri district of West Bengal recorded 42 Nipah related deaths.
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- The disease has a high mortality rate, but experts stress that there is no reason to panic because Nipah outbreaks have always been generally localised.
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What are the symptoms of Nipah?

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- The classical symptom is acute and rapidly progressive encephalitis (brain inflammation and pain) with or without respiratory involvement.
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- Other more noticeable symptoms include non-productive cough during the early part of the disease.
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- Nipah encephalitis comes with 3-14 days of fever and headache, followed by drowsiness, disorientation and mental confusion.
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- Acute encephalitis progresses to coma within 24-48 hours.
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How can the spread of Nipah be contained?

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- Virologists working on the ground have asserted that early diagnosis has helped in containing the spread in the current case.
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- Timely laboratory confirmation and aggressive tracing of those who came in contact with patient can contain spread of the virus.
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- This is very important because there is no effective specific treatment for the infection and hospitalisation is only to support our bodily immune systems.
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- Standard infection control practices (like washing and sanitising) and proper barrier nursing techniques are also critical for curtailing spread.
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Source: Indian Express

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