

Rising H1N1 cases

What is the issue?

\n\n

The reported cases and deaths due to the spread of H1N1 virus are on the rise in comparison with previous years' records.

\n\n

What is H1N1?

\n\n

\n

- Influenza A (H1N1) virus is the subtype of influenza A virus that was the most common cause of human influenza in 2009.

\n

- H1N1 flu is also known as swine flu caused by swine influenza virus that is endemic in pigs.

\n

- It is a highly contagious disease and can easily spread from a patient through saliva and mucus.

\n

\n\n

What are the recent developments?

\n\n

\n

- India is witnessing a new rise in the number of cases and deaths due to swine flu.

\n

- Gujarat is the worst-affected, followed by Rajasthan, Punjab, Maharashtra and Delhi.

\n

- The number of cases in the southern states is also high compared with last year, especially in Tamil Nadu.

\n

\n\n

What is the reason?

\n\n

- \n
- Pune based National Institute of Virology has noted that the **virus has not undergone any significant mutation** directly responsible for the spread or increased mortality.
- \n
- Also, the virulence or the disease causing nature has remained nearly unchanged.
- \n
- However, the virus has undergone **point mutations**.
- \n
- This has resulted in a **new strain called the Michigan strain** which has replaced the California strain which has been prevalent since the 2009 pandemic.
- \n
- Only the Michigan strain is circulating this year as against the co-circulation of both strains last year.
- \n
- While earlier **vaccinations made people immune to the California strain**, the circulation of the new strain is the cause of increased caseload and mortality.
- \n

\n\n

What is to be done?

\n\n

- \n
- **Vaccine** - After mutation, the newer strain emerges stronger than the earlier strain.
- \n
- More research is needed to fully understand the epidemiology of H1N1 caused by the Michigan strain, and who may be more vulnerable.
- \n
- Also, the composition of the swine flu vaccine will require changes as per the World Health Organization (WHO)s recommendation.
- \n
- **Database** - The numbers in the official report do not reflect the true reality.
- \n
- This is because it is not mandatory for the private hospitals to disclose all the deaths and the people affected, to the government's database.
- \n

- There is a need for a system to record and release the actual number of cases **for making appropriate response**.
\n
- **Prevention** - Being a communicable disease, swine flu can best be prevented with **awareness** generation by the governments.
\n
- Uptake of influenza vaccination by people, health-care workers and especially by those belonging to the high-risk category, can go a long way in reducing the cases.
\n
- High-risk categories include pregnant women, very young and old people, those who have had organ transplantation and those with certain underlying illnesses.
\n
- Government should ensure that there are enough **vaccines** in various health centres.
\n
- Also, it should take measures to keep the environment clean to address poor **hygiene and sanitation** being causes of swine flu.
\n
- **Diagnose** - Sufficient lab facilities to diagnose H1N1 cases among both hospitalised and non-hospitalised population is essential.
\n
- The government should do everything possible to take both preventive and curative measures to fight swine flu.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

