

DENGUE FEVER — RUMOR UPDATE

Internews in Afghanistan — November 2022

The current dengue fever outbreak in Afghanistan

Dengue fever, a major cause of severe illness and sometimes death, continues to spread in Afghanistan. In June and July 2022, the province of Nangarhar experienced a surge in cases. Girls over 5 years of age and women accounted for close to 75% of the 64 reported infections. The surveillance system that was established detected 715 cases between September 2021 and January 2022. Between January and June 2022, no cases were detected.

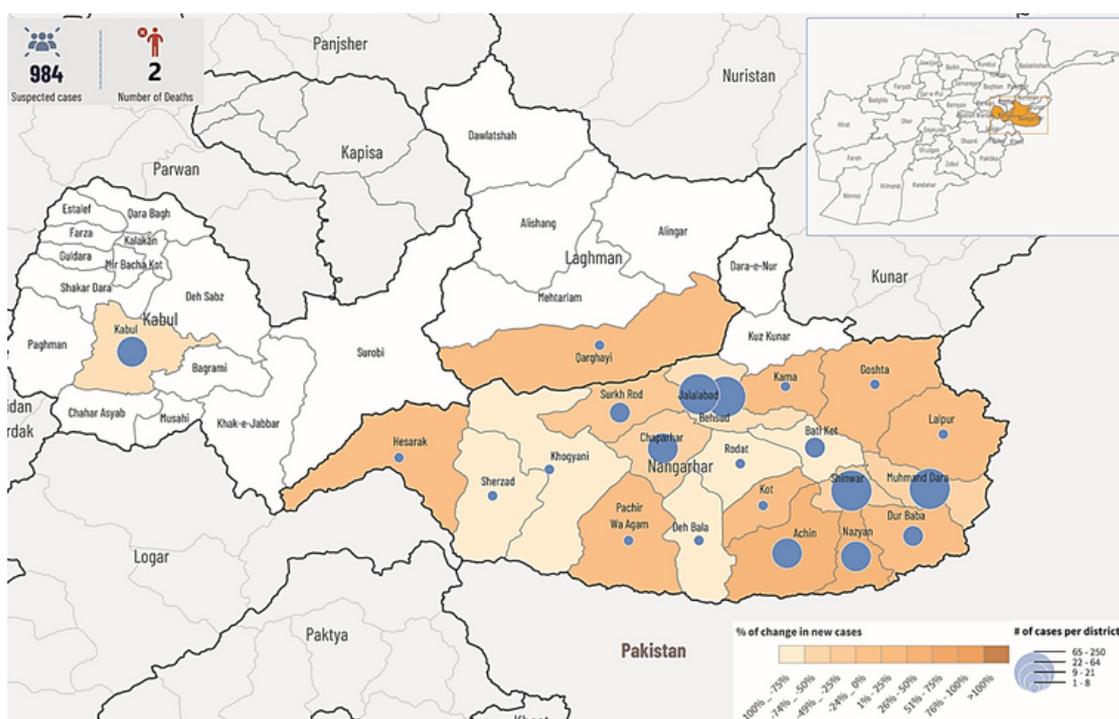
Healthcare workers have been trained as part of the surveillance system to recognize and detect symptoms and to run rapid diagnostic tests. The Nangarhar regional reference laboratory has the capacity to confirm cases, process samples and confirm diagnosis. [1]

A prevention and preparedness program has also been running since December 2021. More than 9,000 gravitraps* have been distributed across the affected region. Larvicide** for killing mosquitoes is in stock in Afghanistan and waiting to be deployed. [2]

* Gravitrap, developed by NEA's Environmental Health Institute (EHI), are designed to attract, and trap female Aedes adult mosquitoes that are looking for sites to lay their eggs in. Female Aedes mosquitoes attempting to lay their eggs in the traps will be captured and prevented from biting other people. [3]

** Larvicides are a type of insecticide used to control mosquitoes indoors and outdoors around your home. They work by killing mosquito larvae and pupae before they can grow into biting adults. [4]

Internews has collected some misinformation about dengue fever and the outbreak that were circulating on social media. This document provides an update for humanitarian and health actors on some of those rumors. During the month of August, we have collected 20 instances of such rumors from Facebook, shared by Afghan social media users.



Hotspot areas of dengue fever cases and percent change of new cases in Afghanistan, Jun-Nov 2022

Source: Infectious Disease Outbreaks Situation Report | Epidemiological Week #46

Rumor Trend: Garlic cures Dengue fever, Pomegranate helps recovery

"Pomegranate is helpful for [dengue fever] ..."

"I found the best cure for [dengue fever] in garlic. After eating two cloves of garlic stewed in rice for three days, there was a complete change in my pain and fever, and on the third day, I completely recovered..."

Why is this important?

- Afghanistan is facing a surge of dengue cases and dengue is now endemic in Afghanistan. Communities in affected provinces need to be aware of the risks and minimizing the possibility for infection.
- There is no specific treatment available for dengue fever. Beliefs that only eating vegetables and fruits will treat dengue fever can lead to communities to not seek health care when necessary.
- In rare cases, dengue fever can turn into severe dengue and become life-threatening. Believing in such rumors can contribute to communities ignore the risks of the severity of the disease, and not apply preventative measures to avoid infection.

Facts

- Fruit and vegetables including garlic and pomegranates are good sources of vitamin C and dietary fiber, which are important for maintaining good health. [5] While vitamin C, fresh fruit and vegetables can make us feel better when ill and help us recover they alone are not preventatives or 'cures' for dengue.
- Dengue fever has no particular treatment. Rest, staying hydrated and seeking medical advice is recommended to dengue fever patients.
- To control the symptoms of muscle aches and pains, and fever, patients can take pain killers pills/analgesics with the best options being acetaminophen or paracetamol. However non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen and aspirin, which thins the blood, should be avoided.
- Based on symptoms and other circumstances, dengue fever patients might be sent home, or be referred for in-hospital management, or may require emergency treatment and urgent referral.
- In case of severe dengue, medical care by physicians and nurses can help in reducing the mortality rate to less than 1% [6]

Recommendations

- It is important to remember that communities trust in natural and traditional medicines are cultural and a key part of how communities take measures to protect themselves. Eating fruit and vegetables are a critical part of maintaining good health, while they may not be cures to particular illnesses.
- Humanitarian and health actors should continue to work with communities vulnerable to dengue and carry out awareness raising about the prevalence of dengue, the increased risk and measures to prevent dengue, and seeking medical care in case of infection. Early detection is critical to prevent dengue from developing in severity.
- Influencers including religious leaders and community-based mobilizers (including women), as well authorities on the border with Pakistan, can support awareness raising efforts.
- Local and national media actors are a critical part of the information ecosystem and may not always have access to official information or have knowledge of the virus and risks. Humanitarian and health actors should engage with media and share information for dissemination in traditional and social media. Well-known local radio and television channels in each province are useful platforms; humanitarian and health specialists could make themselves available to take questions on call-in radio programs.
- Where available, humanitarian and health actors should communicate about the availability and distribution of preventive tools e.g., community health workers are giving preventive tools to large dormitories of Madrasas (religious studies centers) in the eastern region. [7]

Other Rumor Trends

Here are examples of some other rumors about dengue fever that were circulating on social media spaces:

"The side effects of Corona vaccines are placed under the shadow of Dengue fever and Monkeypox disease..."

"[Doctors] kill people under the pretext of Dengue and Corona. We saw that during the Coronavirus period, the doctors removed the oxygen themselves and the patients were given a lot of antibiotics to make them weak and die..."

"There are political goals behind all the claims of the oppressors [WHO]. They want to create anxiety for the nations and make them isolated, so that they can implement their evil goals and plans easily [Pointing to Dengue fever]."

"From all these stories and making adventures, one atom [Atomic bomb] is better, hit until everyone dies. What does it mean that they [the world] makes Cholera for one day and Dengue fever for another day."

INFORMATION ABOUT DENGUE FEVER:

Dengue Fever in Afghanistan, neighboring Pakistan, and Asia:

The first ever dengue fever case in Afghanistan was recorded in 2019 in Nangarhar province – the first cases in Afghanistan are linked to travel to Pakistan. As of 19 November 2022, the total number of dengue fever cases detected in Afghanistan was 984 with 2 deaths (both people had co-morbidities). 99.5% of the patients are over 5 years old and 19.3% are female. Most of the cases identified are dealt with in outpatient departments (OPD); there are very few severe cases. [8][9]

Since the first case in 2019 - the year when the world recorded the largest number of dengue cases - Afghanistan has reported only sporadic outbreaks of dengue. Climate change, floods and drought, conflict, displacement, and humanitarian crises all contribute to the spread of dengue in Afghanistan and elsewhere, underscoring the need for 'One Health' approaches to control its spread. Note that water storage containers, whose use in drought is often increased, provide breeding sites for mosquitoes.

The escalating humanitarian crises in Afghanistan has significantly increased the vulnerability of the Afghan people to infection and disease. In addition, Afghanistan is # experiencing warmer temperatures, lower snowfall and rain fall which combine to create a conducive environment for mosquitoes to multiply and expand their habitats. With nearly 80 percent of households reporting water shortages in October 2022, the spread of dengue fever looms large. [10]

The rise of dengue in Afghanistan is not an isolated phenomenon. Increasing numbers of dengue cases and recurring outbreaks are being reported in Asian countries where they account for 70% of the global dengue burden. [11]

In neighboring Pakistan, where dengue is endemic and seasonal outbreaks are the norm, cases spiked sharply in the aftermath of the unprecedented floods in mid-2022 (which are also attributed to the climate crisis). Nearly 75% of the 25,932 cases of infection and 62 deaths from January to September 2022, were reported in the month of September 2022. [12] Close to 40% of the cases were reported from provinces that border Afghanistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is also home to about 1.2 million refugees from Afghanistan.

The cross-border movement of people and goods (for example secondhand tires) between Pakistan and Afghanistan through Torkham border is eastern Nangarhar province is contributing to the spread of dengue. [13]

What is Danguue Fever?

Dengue fever is a viral disease caused by dengue virus. It is mainly transmitted to humans through bite of female infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. These mosquitoes can also spread Zika, chikungunya, and other viruses. [14] Each year, an estimated 400 million people around the world are infected with dengue virus through the bites of infected mosquitoes. [15]



Signs and Symptoms

80% of people that infected with dengue virus will experience no symptoms or mild symptoms like simple fever. [16][17] Following are the most common symptom of dengue is fever:

- Aches and pains (eye pain, typically behind the eyes, muscle, joint, or bone pain)
- Nausea, vomiting
- Rash

These symptoms typically begin three to fourteen days after infection and can usually last 2–7 days. You should contact a healthcare provider if you develop a fever or have symptoms of dengue. [18][19]

What is Severe Dengue?

In rare cases dengue can be very serious and potentially life threatening. This is known as severe dengue or dengue hemorrhagic fever.

People who have had dengue before are at most risk of severe dengue if they become infected again. Signs of severe dengue can include:

- severe tummy pain
- a swollen tummy
- being sick repeatedly and vomiting blood
- bleeding gums or bleeding under the skin
- breathing difficulties or fast breathing
- cold, clammy skin
- a weak but fast pulse
- drowsiness or loss of consciousness

If you have symptoms of severe dengue, you should immediately seek medical care. [20]

Measures to prevent Dengue Fever

You can avoid dengue fever by preventing mosquito bites. This might be possible by [21]:

- **Reduce Mosquito Habitat:** Mosquitoes lay eggs near water. Once a week, empty and scrub, turn over, cover, or throw out items that hold water, such as tires, buckets, planters, toys, pools, birdbaths, flowerpots, or trash containers inside and outside near your home.
- **Stay in well-screened houses:** Mosquitoes are most active between the time period dawn to dusk – keep all your windows and shutters closed during this time. Ensure that the windows are closed properly, or the door screens do not contain any holes.
- **Use Mosquito Repellents:** Apply mosquito repellent creams on your body when travelling to tropical destinations and even when you are indoors. For children or infants, you can purchase mosquito patches, mosquito bands and mosquito wipes.
- **Wear Protective Clothing:** Wear long-sleeved clothes and full pants with socks & covered shoes.
- **Sleep Under Mosquito-net:** Sleeping under the mosquito net can provide you and your children a double layer of protection from being bitten by mosquitoes.

Other Helpful Resources

You can find more helpful information about dengue fever, situational reports, and the information about the outbreak in the following links:

- Dengue and severe dengue (who.int)
- Dengue | [CDC](http://cdc.gov)
- WHO EMRO | Infectious disease outbreak situation reports | [Information resources](#)

About us

Rooted in Trust (RiT) is a USAID BHA-funded project run by Internews to support humanitarian, public health agencies and local media to combat and manage the spread of rumors and misinformation about COVID-19. This regular collection of community insights aims to provide humanitarian and public health agencies ideas to integrate and align their risk communication activities with community perspectives and provide information according to the needs to the community. In Afghanistan, Internews is collaborating with local media partners and the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Sub-Working Group (RCCE SWG).

We would love your feedback on this product! Contact us also to join our mailing list, collaborate and share data. Please contact Mir Rohullah Sadat, Senior Program Coordinator, Internews - msadat@internews.org



Sources

- [1][2][7][8][13] Key Informant Interview with Infectious Hazard Preparedness (IHP) | WHO Health Emergency Program (WHE) Afghanistan Team | 23/10/2022
- [3] [NEA | Areas with Higher Aedes aegypti Mosquito Population](#)
- [4] [Larvicides | Mosquitoes | CDC](#)
- [5] [5 A Day - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)
- [6][11][14][16] [Dengue and severe dengue \(who.int\)](http://who.int)
- [9] [Afghanistan Infectious Disease Outbreaks | Week 46 \(who.int\)](#)
- [10] [UNICEF Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report No. 11 for 31 October 2022 - Afghanistan](#)
- [12] [Dengue - Pakistan \(who.int\)](http://who.int)
- [15] [Avoid Dengue by Preventing Mosquito Bites | Division of Vector-Borne Diseases | NCEZID | CDC](#)
- [17] [Eurosurveillance | Yellow fever and dengue: a threat to Europe?](#)
- [18] [Dengue and COVID-19 | Dengue | CDC](#)
- [19] [Dengue fever | The BMJ](#)
- [20] [Dengue - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)
- [21] [Prevent Mosquito Bites | Dengue | CDC](#)