

# 'TOMATO FLU' DETECTED AMONG CHILDREN IN INDIA, SAYS LANCET

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On alert: Health Department personnel carrying out thermal screening amidst the tomato flu scare. Special Arrangement

A new infection dubbed tomato flu, or tomato fever, has been detected in India mostly among children younger than five, according to a report in the *Lancet Respiratory Journal*.

The “non-life-threatening” virus was first identified in Kollam district of Kerala on May 6. As of July 26, more than 82 children younger than five had been reported with the infection by government hospitals in Kerala, the report published in the August 17 issue of the journal said.

It further said that this endemic viral illness triggered an alert in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Additionally, 26 children (aged one to nine) were reported with the infection in Odisha. “To date, apart from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha, no other region in India has been affected by the virus. However, precautionary measures are being taken by the Kerala Health Department to monitor the spread of the viral infection and prevent its spread in other parts of India,” the report noted.

## Primary symptoms

The primary symptoms of tomato flu are similar to those of chikungunya, which include high fever, rashes, and intense pain in the joints. As with other viral infections, further symptoms include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration, swelling of joints, body aches, and common influenza-like symptoms, which are similar to those manifested in dengue.

As tomato flu is similar to chikungunya and dengue as well as hand, foot, and mouth disease, the treatment is also similar — isolation, rest, plenty of fluids, and hot water sponge for the relief of irritation and rashes. Supportive therapy of paracetamol for fever and body ache and other symptomatic treatments may be required.

Similar to other types of influenza, tomato flu is very contagious and children are at an increased risk of exposure as viral infections are common in this age group and the spread is likely to be through close contact, the report noted.

Young children are also prone to this infection through the use of nappies, touching unclean surfaces, and putting things directly into the mouth.

Given the similarities to hand, foot, and mouth disease, if the outbreak of tomato flu in children is not controlled and prevented, the transmission might lead to serious consequences by spreading in adults as well, the report said.

“The ‘tomato flu’ is caused by Coxsackievirus A 16. It belongs to Enterovirus family. Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a frequent febrile rash illness of childhood caused by enteroviruses (EV): Coxsackie A16 (CA16), EV A71, Coxsackie A6, Coxsackie B and Echo viruses,” said Dr. Suresh Kumar Panuganti, paediatrician, Yashoda Hospitals, Hyderabad.

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