

## TWO DIE AS H3N2 INFLUENZA CASES RISE

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March 10, 2023 05:27 pm | Updated March 11, 2023 07:55 am IST - New Delhi

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Coimbatore Corporation staff check the temperature of a woman at a fever surveillance camp on March 10, 2023. | Photo Credit: M. Periasamy

At least two persons have succumbed to the H3N2 subtype of seasonal influenza, which has infected rising numbers of people since mid-December last year, the Health Ministry has confirmed. After a country-wide surveillance exercise, the Ministry said that it had found at least 451 confirmed cases of H3N2 since the beginning of this year.

The [first recorded death from H3N2 this year was of an 82-year-old man in Karnataka's Hassan district](#). Hire Gowda was hospitalised on February 24 and died on March 1, according to official reports. He was suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure.

The second deceased was a 56-year-old lung cancer patient in Haryana's Jind district who tested positive for the H3N2 virus in January and succumbed to it last week.

Patients infected with H3N2 display symptoms similar to COVID-19: fever, cough, breathlessness, wheezing and pneumonia. The Health Ministry has advised social distancing and mask wearing to prevent the spread of the virus.

"The Ministry is also tracking and keeping a close watch on morbidity and mortality due to the H3N2 subtype of the seasonal influenza. Young children and old age persons with co-morbidities are the most vulnerable groups in the context of seasonal influenza," the Ministry's statement said.

An almost real-time surveillance of cases of influenza-like illnesses and severe acute respiratory infections presenting in health facilities is being undertaken by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the National Centre for Disease Control.

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The H3N2 case numbers have been confirmed from a pool of symptomatic flu cases, of which over 3.97 lakh were reported in January. In February, this number increased slightly to 4.36 lakh cases. Upto March 9, India has reported over 1.33 lakh cases of flu this month.

Of these cases, 15,826 cases worsened and were hospitalised with severe acute respiratory illness (SARI) since January. Samples of SARI patients were sent for genomic sequencing to

understand the exact strain of virus that has infected them.

According to the latest data available on the integrated health information platform, a total of 3,038 laboratory confirmed cases of various subtypes of influenza, including H3N2, have been reported till March 9. This includes 1,245 cases in January, 1,307 in February and 486 cases so far this month.

“India every year witnesses two peaks of seasonal influenza: one from January to March and other in the post-monsoon season. The cases arising from seasonal influenza are expected to decline from March end,” the Ministry said.

Apart from H3N2, a total of 955 cases of H1N1 virus — better known as swine flu — have also been reported, the Ministry has confirmed. The majority of H1N1 cases were reported from Tamil Nadu (545), apart from cases in Maharashtra (170), Gujarat (74), Kerala (42) and Punjab (28).

Oseltamivir, a drug used to treat H1N1, has been recommended by the World Health Organization for the treatment of H3N2 cases as well, the Health Ministry said.

“The drug is made available through the public health system free of cost. Government has allowed sale of Oseltamivir under Schedule H1 of Drug and Cosmetic Act in February 2017 for wider accessibility and availability. Adequate logistics is available with the States. However, in case of any emergencies the Indian government has been providing the support to the States to tide over the crisis,” the statement added.

On March 11, NITI Aayog will hold an inter-ministerial meeting to review the seasonal influenza situation in the States, and discuss ways to further support them in terms of public health measures, management guidelines and protocols to manage the increasing cases.

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