

Doctors had discussed NiV threat in Kerala

Preetu Nair | TNN | May 23, 2018, 08:38 IST



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Representative image

KOCHI: Much before Nipah virus killed three persons in Kozhikode, health experts in state had been discussing about the increased threat of emerging, infectious disease, including Nipah virus, in Kerala. “There has been (at least) one new infection every year (since 1970) and 30 new infectious diseases over the past 20 years. The risk of an infectious disease outbreak is increasing in

Kerala,” said Dr Rakesh P S, centre for public health, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, Kochi.

He said that the probable reason for this situation could be the destruction of forest due to rapid urbanization. This has destroyed the natural habitat of animals and birds, including bats. “Now, there is increased contact between man and animal. This increases the risk of many zoonotic diseases,” he added.

“This is just the beginning of the problem of infectious diseases the state is going to face,” said Dr Sajith Kumar R, head, department of infectious diseases, Kottayam Medical College.

Due to environmental contamination and ecological damaged, many of the exotic viruses, which can affect the population, is now a reality, he said. “There are also vulnerabilities associated with overpopulation, overcrowding and migration and the state is battling water and air pollution, besides waste management,” he added.

Take the case of Nipah virus that existed in bats for centuries and this virus had not undergone an evolutionary change but now the infection is spreading due to ecological factors, said doctors. The virus first spread in Malaysia due to unplanned felling of pulp wood, which is the natural habitat for NiV-carrying bats and mismanagement of large piggeries. In Bangladesh and later West Bengal, the outbreak happened due to the increase in human-bat interactions.