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KERALA

Keep off infected areas, say doctors

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

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With the vacation season on, doctors have advised against visiting areas infected with the Nipah virus. Those already there should stick to drinking mineral water, avoid crowded areas and stay away from fruits with soft skin grapes and mangoes to minimise the risk of contracting the disease, doctors have said.

Basic precautions

Basic precautions must be taken, said Vidya Menon, senior medical administrator, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, Kochi. "But everyone travelling to **Kerala** need not worry. The cases are clustered in Kozhikode district."

"People who come into contact with fruit bats or those living in close contact with infected people are at risk.

Increased travel and population migration and increased interaction with animals, global warming, etc., contribute to the emergence of these zoonotic diseases. Avoid fruits and vegetables bitten by fruit bats. Infection spreads from infected animals to humans and among humans through body fluids," she said.

Flu-like symptoms

Nipah induces flu-like symptoms that often lead to encephalitis and coma. Fruit bats are considered the main carrier of the virus for which there is no vaccination, according to the World Health Organization.

Atul Gogia, senior consultant, Department of Medicine, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, said, "Travel to the affected area is best avoided. But the situation is still evolving... we cannot send out an advisory to isolate the area. The government has mobilised a national and State programme to contain the situation. We, as doctors, would strongly recommend taking adequate precautions."

Indian Medical Association past president K.K. Aggarwal said people must not consume fruits that have fallen on the ground.

No vaccine

"The problem is there is no vaccine or medicine for the disease. The only treatment is giving supportive medicines and palliative care," he said.