

Sattari villagers pay for ignoring KFD protective measures

Since last three years Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) has been repeatedly infecting the people living near forest areas. But the lethal combination of ignorance and complacency regarding the disease and its preventive measures among Sattari villagers makes them easy prey for KFD, finds out **NIBEDITA SEN**

Sheikh Murad came to Community Health Center (CHC), Valpoi with high fever last Tuesday. Being detected with Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), Murad was admitted immediately.

Murad who has a cashew business, frequently visits the cashew plantation at Velus. But he has never bothered to take any precautionary measures against tick bites like wearing covered clothes or applying DMP oil or even take vaccination shots. The result was he got infected with KFD.

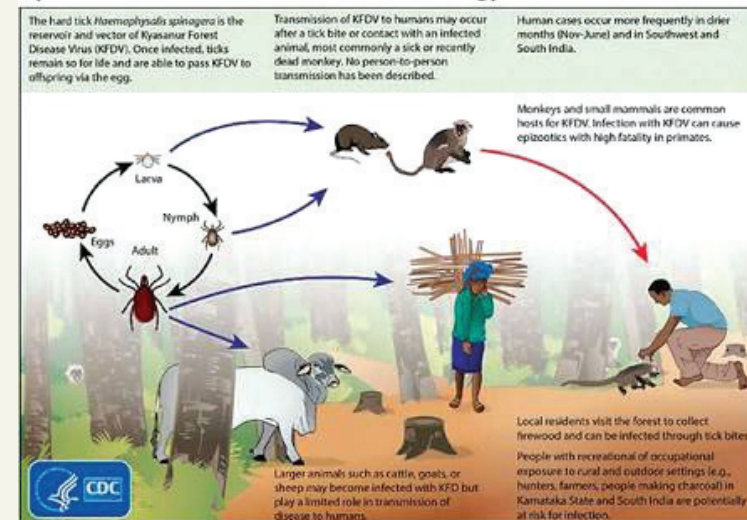
This is because he had never heard of the disease before, or perhaps never bothered to find out more about it.

Accompanied by his cousin, Murad's mother, Zohrabi Shaikh, came to see her son, clueless of what is to be done next.

"He had 103 degree Celsius fever for two days at a stretch. We brought him to the hospital and learnt about this disease. Prior to this, we did not know anything about KFD," Zohrabi Shaikh said.

Murad is not the only one of kind.

Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) Virus Ecology



There are many more such KFD positive patients or suspects who are sailing on the same boat.

Lalita Chandru Gaonkar from Sattari was admitted in CHC Valpoi due to low blood pressure on Saturday. Despite having a health condi-

tion that makes her vulnerable to KFD, Lalita has been missing vaccination shots.

"In my house everyone is vaccinated. But the vaccination timing clashes with my work schedule. Hence I am unable to take the vac-

cine," she said.

When the medical attendants went to her house to provide vaccination to the family, she had gone out for working in cashew plantation.

Despite having advised by the employer to take vaccination, she neglected taking the free vaccine.

Kiran Jaiswal, a three month pregnant woman from Honda and a migrant from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, was suffering from high fever for continuous fifteen days and was then admitted to CHC on Saturday.

The peculiar problem with Kiran is that being a migrant, she is not only unfamiliar with the terrain, but is also unaware about KFD. This is the reason she has not taken any vaccine shot yet.

Saraswati Mahadev Korgaonkar, a housewife is suffering from kidney stone and cold is a KFD suspect. But she too hasn't taken any KFD vaccine dose yet.

Another KFD suspect Babita Powar, a cashew farmer, did not wear any full sleeve clothe or foot protection while she at work.

"I use stick to pluck the cashews from ground. Why do I need to wear full sleeve clothing?" asked a bewildered Babita.

After being admitted on Wednesday, Babita suffered continuous two days of high fever. She was vaccinated with the first dose recently.

Suffering from intermittent fever, Tulsidas Sawant was admitted to CHC Valpoi. In spite of being the father of a medical attendant, he

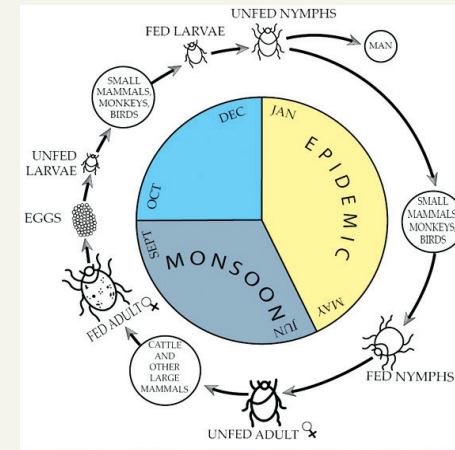


Fig. 1: Life cycle of KFD virus with seasonal incidence of KFD

came less regarding the disease.

According to Prasad Sawant, son of Tulsidas Sawant he did not fell it necessary to vaccinate his father.

"I did not find it necessary my father vaccinated. Though tick bites have been reported in my area, I didn't expect my father to contract

PRECAUTIONS NEEDED AGAINST KFD

- Vaccination
- Tick repellent
- Full sleeve bright shirt
- Trousers, closed footwear

the disease," Tulsidas said.

If this was not enough, the senior Sawant never took any precaution against KFD, even though he visits the cashew fields.

It is not just ignorance but also complacency which is resulting in people disregarding precaution.

"During the initial years, the problem was people weren't coming forward to take vaccine shots. But now the issue is people are not completing the vaccination course as they think one shot is enough to protect them," State Epidemiologist Dr Utkarsh Betodkar said (see interview).

One has to take three doses. Subsequently, one year after the third dose, a person has to take booster dose, which has to be repeated annually for at least next five years.

"The villagers are taking the first vaccination dose but are neglecting the subsequent ones. This is because of the lack of fear for the disease," Dr Betodkar said.

Conservator of Forests (Conservation), Goa Mahesh Kumar Shambhu said that there is an immediate need of keeping an eye on the unnatural death of monkeys (see interview).

"At the same time, people must cooperate with health authorities and get themselves vaccinated. Prevention is better than cure," he said.

Recommended dosage schedule

Dose 1 – zero day

Dose 2 – After one month

Dose 3 – At 6-9 months



A farm labourer working in cashew plantation without protection.



Senior health and forest officials take stock of KFD cases at Valpoi CHC on Saturday. Pics: Atish Naik

"I use stick to pluck the cashews from ground. Why do I need to wear full sleeve clothing?"



-BABITA POWAR
KFD suspect

"Being a migrant, I am not only unfamiliar with the terrain, but also unaware about KFD."



-KIRAN JAISWAL
KFD suspect

BICHOLIM ON RADAR OF HEALTH DEPT FOR KFD

With KFD positive cases getting registered again this year, State Epidemiologist Dr Utkarsh Betodkar shares his thoughts on the disease with **GT**.

GT: What do you see reason for high positive cases of KFD every year?

Ans: The surveillance has certainly helped in detecting the disease. Our aim is not to leave any suspected outbreaks unattended. Now we know that KFD has been always present in the population living near forest areas and it won't go away. Neither the ticks nor monkeys will stop living in forests. The people will also not stop entering the forest.

GT: Every year we are seeing newer areas infected with KFD. Is the disease spreading?

Ans: We have asked the central government to check for herd immunity in affected areas. Herd immunity is resistance to the spread of a contagious disease within a population that results if a suffi-

ciently high proportion of individuals are immune to the disease, especially through vaccination. As more areas get immune to the disease, it will start affecting the untouched areas. Western Ghats is a huge and well connected terrain with a similar topography.

GT: Which are the new areas under your radar?

Ans: Immediate new area that we are focusing on is Bicholim. Its topography is exactly similar to Sattari, which is covered partly by Community Health Centre (CHC) Valpoi and Primary Health Centre (PHC). There is every possibility that the movement of infected monkeys from Sattari to this side can bring the disease here. So we have put our staff on alert to keep an eye on any unnatural monkey death here.

GT: What is the vaccine adherence scenario?

Ans: People are mostly taking the first dose. After that their fear for the disease goes and very few

come back for taking the second and third dose. Our IEC (Information Education and Communication) activities are aimed at creating awareness.

There is dosage schedule that should be followed (see Table). The third dose will boost immunity only by 80 per cent, which will last for a year. Subsequently from the date of third dose, every year one has to take a yearly booster dose till the disease is there in the area. Both are available with the government.

GT: The vaccine was developed in 1960s by National Institute of Virology, Pune. Is there a need to modify the vaccine preparation now?

Ans: Till now the virus has not changed its complexion and hence the existing vaccine has remained effective.

Nevertheless, it should be certainly reviewed. If it is still as per the required standards then it should be continued. But if not, then it should be modified.



Conservator of Forests M K Shambhu, along with Deputy Conservator of Forests Dr Sunil Kumar, State Epidemiologist Dr Utkarsh Batodkar and other officials visited the site where the carcass of a KFD infected monkey was burnt at Hirvem village in Valpoi on Saturday.

'FOREST DEPT HAS SHOWN THE WAY IN TAKING PRECAUTIONS'

Role of forest department is extremely crucial in detection of KFD as monkey carcass in forest is first indicator of suspected KFD virus infection in the area. Talking to **GT**, Conservator of Forests (Conservation), Goa Mahesh Kumar Shambhu emphasises on the need for continuous surveillance.

GT: How is Forest department ensuring KFD surveillance?

Ans: Primarily by foot and camera trapping we are finding out unusual behaviour in monkeys. Deaths of monkeys are instantly reported. We keep in touch with health department, veterinary department and with the people too. KFD was not in our mind 5-6 years ago, but now it is on our radar. Disposal of carcass are done in a very scientific way. This is being done in all the wildlife sanctuaries in Goa, not just Mhadei wildlife sanctuary. We are keeping an eye on unnatural deaths of monkeys.

GT: How do you see the response to vaccination drives?

Ans: There has to be greater ad-

There has to be adherence to vaccinations, especially for the second and third dose. Otherwise it will be difficult to contain the spread of this disease."



-MAHESH KUMAR SHAMBHU
Conservator of Forests, Goa

herence to vaccinations, especially for the second and third dose. Otherwise it will be difficult to contain the spread of this disease. Monkey population is naturally controlled by certain diseases.

GT: Although monkey death is key indicator of suspected KFD, it creates fear in the local population. How does forest department handle this situation?

Ans: In my opinion the fear factor has already reduced. This is the reason why people are not coming back in large numbers for second and third dose.

We can neither eliminate monkeys completely nor ticks. Therefore vaccination is the best ways to keep ourselves safe. If all eight dos-

es are taken then probably things would improve.

GT: Forest officials have remained untouched by KFD. How have you achieved this?

Ans: Our personnel take precautions. All of them have been timely vaccinated.

Although the local people have other engagements, but we have shown that taking safety measures help.

GT: Why every time Sattari area is more affected than other forested areas?

Ans: It is difficult to say. More studies are required to comment conclusively on the any of such thing. We are not sure why KFD is more prevalent in Sattari region.