



TOMATO FLU: A MYSTERIOUS CHALLENGE TO MANKIND

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INTRODUCTION

While mankind is still battling COVID-19, a new virus known as tomato flu has emerged in India. It has mainly afflicted children younger than 5 years. This rare viral infection is considered non-life threatening and is in the endemic state. The first case of tomato flu has been observed in the state of Kerala and since then 82 cases have been reported so far.^[1] Moreover, Odisha has also reported 26 cases of tomato flu and all neighbouring states like Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra are on alert. Tomato flu or tomato fever is atypical viral disease with manifestations like skin irritation, dehydration, and rashes. It won't be a new viral contamination however will be an after-impact of chikungunya or dengue fever in children. Tomato flu can be a new variant of the viral hand, foot, and mouth disease as suggested by few studies. It targets mostly children aged 1–5 years and immunocompromised adults.^[2] The flu got its name from the emergence of red and painful blisters throughout the body that gradually enlarge to the size of a tomato.

Symptoms

The primary manifestations of tomato flu are similar to those of chikungunya, which include high fever, rashes, and intense pain in joints.^[3,4] Appearance of red and painful blisters throughout the body which later enlarge to the size of a tomato is responsible for the name tomato flu. These blisters resemble the ones visible with the monkeypox virus in young individuals. Rashes that appear on the skin are responsible for the skin irritation. Additional symptoms like fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, dehydration, swelling of joints, body aches are similar symptoms to those seen in dengue.^[5]



Fig 1: Blisters on the skin.

Causes

The precise cause of the tomato virus outbreak remains unknown. Further investigations by researchers and medical experts are required to find more details of the virus that causes tomato fever.^[6]

Diagnosis

Molecular and serological tests are used for the diagnosis of tomato fever similar to that of Zika virus, Chikungunya, and Dengue. The tomato virus infection is confirmed after ruling out the other viral infections.^[7]

Treatment

The treatment available for Tomato flu is similar to that of Chikungunya and Dengue because of the similarities in their symptoms. Isolation, rest, plenty of fluids and hot water sponge are essential for the relief of irritation and rashes.

Supportive therapy with paracetamol for the management of fever and bodyache and other symptomatic treatments are mandatory.^[8,9]

Prevention

The proverb "Prevention is better than cure" best suits to tomato flu. Since more studies is required to unravel the causes and design a treatment strategy, precautionary measures safeguards our children from tomato fever. Some preventive measures to avoid this flu are following.

- Avoid close contact with the infected person.

- Teach the children about this virus and its consequences at the body.
 - Educate people about the signs and symptoms of tomato fever so that they can maintain social distance from persons showing those symptoms.
 - Tell them not to shake hands, play, or hug any child who has symptoms of tomato fever.
 - Encourage children to maintain hygiene and stop activities that involve bodily fluids like sucking their thumb or picking their nose.
 - Tell them to apply a handkerchief whilst sneezing or coughing in the event that they have a runny nose or cough to keep away from the disease.
 - Sharing of toys, clothes, food, or other items between infected and non-infected children should be prevented.
 - Tell them not to scratch or rub the blister and wash it every time you touch these blisters.
 - Encourage the children to drink plenty of water, milk, juice, etc. to keep them hydrated.
 - Isolate the child if they are showing symptoms of tomato fever.
 - All utensils, clothes, toys and other items of the children should be regularly cleaned and sanitized.
 - It is recommended to use warm water to bathe or clean the skin of the child.
 - Include immunity-boosters and nutrient-rich foods in the diet of the child.^[10,11]
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CONCLUSION

Tomato flu is a rare viral disease that mainly attacks children younger than 5 years of age. The exact cause is not yet known and research is warranted to know more details of this infection. Drug repurposing and vaccination are the most effective methods to safeguard the public from viral infections, especially in children, older people, immunocompromised people, and those with underlying health issues.

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