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Encephalitis death toll in India at 250



By Biswajeet Banerjee, Associated Press Writer

LUCKNOW, India — The death toll from an encephalitis outbreak in northern India passed 250 over the weekend, and the mosquito-borne disease showed little sign of abating, a government official said Monday.

Officials reported 41 new deaths, raising the three-week death toll to 253.

The majority of the dead are children. Some 300 people have been hospitalized, many of them in serious condition, D. P. Mishra, joint director of Uttar Pradesh state health services, told The Associated Press.

Health Minister Jaiveer Singh said that the government was doing its best to control the disease as it spreads throughout the state — vaccinating children and spraying insecticide to kill mosquitos in the affected areas.

Encephalitis causes high fevers and vomiting and ultimately can leave patients comatose. It can be prevented by vaccinations, but state health authorities say they don't have enough money for a statewide immunization program.

"We are helpless now. We are waiting for the encephalitis to die its natural death by mid-October," Singh said.

Encephalitis often spreads during the monsoon season because of an increase in the number of mosquitoes, which breed in stagnant water. India's monsoon season begins in June and ends in September.

The outbreak of encephalitis was initially confined to Gorakhpur, 165 miles east of Lucknow, and other eastern areas of the state. Health Minister Singh said the disease has spread to 22 new districts.

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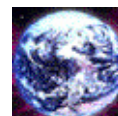
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