

Cambodian disease linked to enterovirus 71

Cambodian health officials and the World Health Organization say most of the children who died from a mystery disease in Cambodia had contracted the EV-71 [human enterovirus 71] infection -- a virus linked to hand, foot and mouth disease [HFMD]. The children were below 3 years of age and were mainly from the southern and central parts of the country. 56 have died since April 2012.

Dr Nimal Asgari, a WHO spokesman in Phnom Penh, said a significant number of the samples tested by the Institut Pasteur identified the virus as EV-71. However, it is still not known if all the children had the virus because not all children were able to provide samples.

As part of the continuing investigations into the undiagnosed illness, the Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Cambodia is finalizing the review of all suspected hospitalised cases. This final review added an additional 2 cases between April to 5 Jul 2012, making the total number of children affected to be 59. Of these, 52 have died. The age of the cases range from 3 months to 11 years old, with the majority being under 3 years old. The overall male:female ratio is 1.3:1. Laboratory samples were not available for the majority of the cases as they died before appropriate samples could be taken.

Based on the latest laboratory results, a significant proportion of the samples tested positive for enterovirus 71 (EV-71), which causes hand foot and mouth disease (HFMD). The EV-71 virus has been known to generally cause severe complications amongst some patients. Additionally, a number of other pathogens, including dengue and "Streptococcus suis" were identified in some of the samples. The samples were found to be negative for H5N1 and other influenza viruses, SARS and Nipah viruses.

Further investigations into matching the clinical, laboratory and epidemiological information are ongoing and are likely to be concluded in a few days. WHO and partners, which include Institut Pasteur and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are assisting the Ministry of Health with this event. The government is also reinforcing awareness of good hygiene practices to the public, which include frequent washing of hands.

Some facts on hand foot and mouth disease: Hand foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common infectious disease of infants and children. The symptoms commonly observed include fever, painful sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters on hands, feet and also buttocks. HFMD is most commonly caused by coxsackievirus A16, which usually results in a mild, self-limiting disease with a few complications. HFMD is also caused by enteroviruses, including enterovirus 71 (EV71), which has been associated with serious complications in certain groups and may cause deaths.

Source: <http://www.promedmail.org>

Photo: www.bloomberg.com