

Measles leaves over 20 children dead in Musa Qala

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LASHKARGAH/KABUL

Measles has left a number of children dead in the restive Musa Qala district of the southern Helmand province, residents and officials said on Wednesday. Many others are down with the contagious disease.

Confirming the breakout of the viral infection in the town, a former Taliban bastion, Dr Roohullah Mazloom told Pajhwok Afghan News the affected children were faced with great problems as vaccine and drugs for measles were not easily available in the district.

Since the arrival of the harsh Afghan winter, the highly communicable ailment has claimed more than 20 lives, with many more minors down with it. A Lanay Nawa dweller urged the authorities concerned to rush emergency medical aid to the victims. Shah Agha stressed efforts at preventing the disease from spreading to other areas.

Regay area resident Sanaullah, who lost a nephew to the contagion three days back, said the child had red blotches all over his body before suffering from a fatal fever. He also requested the government to ensure the dispatch of the requisite medicines to the district before it was too late to control the measles spread.

Helmand Public Health Director Dr Inayatullah Ghafari, unaware of the epidemic, said: We have sent two tonnes of medicines to the area, where a government-run clinic remains open to treat visitors.

The government has received no complaint about the measles outbreak, according to the director, who said inhabitants with any medical problem could visit the Musa Qala Hospital to seek advice and treatment from doctors.

In Kabul, a Public Health Ministry official also denied receiving any report about the flare-up in Musa Qala. I don't think there is such an illness in the district. A team of experts will be sent to the area to assess the situation if we are formally provided with a report, Dr Ahmed Shah observed.

Cough, coryza (runny nose), conjunctivitis (red eyes) and a fever for at least three days are among the classical symptoms of measles, doctors explain. The fever may soar to 104 Fahrenheit, with red spots visible inside the victims' mouth.

The characteristic measles rash erupts several days after the fever attacks the child. It starts on the head before spreading to cover most of the body, often causing itching. The rash is said to stain, changing colour from red to dark brown before disappearing.

Research shows the measles is a highly contagious airborne pathogen which spreads primarily via the respiratory system. The virus is transmitted in respiratory secretions and can be passed from person to person via aerosol droplets containing virus particles, such as those produced by a coughing patient.

After several days of intense fighting in early December, Taliban guerrillas withdrew from the town they controlled for more than 10 months. The insurgents said they left the district to avoid civilian casualties in fierce clashes, touched off by an Afghan-NATO offensive. Translated & edited by S. Mudassir Ali Shah

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