

India battles spike in dengue cases amid COVID pandemic

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Nikhil Mandal, 15, a dengue patient at New Delhi's LNJP Hospital [Bilal Kuchay/Al Jazeera]

New Delhi, November 11 (RHC)-- Wrapped in a thick blanket, 15-year-old Nikhil Mandal is lying on a bed inside Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan (LNJP) Hospital in India's capital New Delhi.

Mandal's blood platelet count has dropped to an alarming 8,000 after he developed severe chills and high fever and was diagnosed with dengue, with his family fearing his condition might worsen further.

Nikhil Mandal is among nearly 1,170 cases of dengue fever reported over the past week in New Delhi as India battles yet another health crisis amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In all, 2,708 cases have been reported in the city so far this year.

At least nine people have died of the disease in the Indian capital, the highest such fatalities in the city this year since 2017 when the official death count hit 10. As New Delhi's hospitals see a steady flow of dengue patients, the government has directed them to use the beds reserved for COVID-19 patients.

To fight his fever, Mandal needs to maintain an optimum platelet count that necessitates regular blood transfusion. "I am very scared. I don't know what to do. His platelet count is decreasing and I have been asked by doctors to arrange a donor," Mandal's mother Puja told Al Jazeera.

"Where will I arrange the donor?" she asked, adding that her husband, who is suffering from back pain, is home taking care of their two other children.

In the same ward of the government-run hospital, 20-year-old Irshad Hussain is on a bed opposite Mandal. "We thought he had fever because of tuberculosis, which he was diagnosed with three months back. But when we ran some tests, he was diagnosed with dengue and since then he has been admitted here," his father Sajad Husain told Al Jazeera. "We were taking all the precautions for COVID and now we have dengue. We don't know what's happening," he said.

LNJP Hospital authorities told Al Jazeera they were seeing approximately 100 patients with high fever every day and most of them tested positive for dengue. "The number of COVID patients has decreased tremendously and we only have a few patients but now we are getting dengue patients," said Dr Ritu Saxena, the hospital's deputy medical superintendent.

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