More than 100 children die in India in encephalitis outbreak

June 18 2019, by Indrajit Singh

More than 100 children have died in an encephalitis outbreak in India's eastern state of Bihar, authorities said Tuesday.

Bihar health secretary Sanjay Kumar said 106 children had died and more than 430 others between the ages of 4 and 10 were being treated at hospitals in Muzaffarpur district, 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of Patna, the state capital.

Despite the deaths, Kumar said the mortality rate among children from encephalitis, which can cause swelling of the brain, a burning fever and vomiting, had dropped to 26.5% from 34% a year ago.

Young children are particularly vulnerable to the disease.

Villagers crowded outside Sri Krishna Medical College Hospital in Muzaffarpur, where some of the sick children are being treated, to protest a visit by Bihar's chief minister, whom they accused of only coming to the area after the death toll passed 100. Left-wing political organizations also rallied in New Delhi, demanding that the Bihar government do more to prevent what has become an annual outbreak.

"This acute encephalitis syndrome has been recurring in Bihar and the government has not taken any steps. And who is dying? It is the children of the very poor," said Mariam Dhawale of the All India Democratic Women's Association.

Thousands of Indians suffer from encephalitis, malaria, typhoid and other mosquito-borne diseases each year during the summer monsoon season.