

Death toll in Indian encephalitis outbreak rises to 152

June 24 2019, by Indrajit Singh



Activists of Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist) shout slogans condemning deaths of more than 100 children in an encephalitis outbreak this month in eastern Bihar state, during a protest in Hyderabad, India, Monday, June 24, 2019. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

India's Supreme Court on Monday directed state and national authorities

to file reports to the court on an encephalitis outbreak in the eastern state of Bihar this month in which 152 children have died.

A senior health department official in Bihar, Sanjay Kumar, said the epidemic is showing signs of slowing with no new deaths on Monday. The fatalities have occurred in 20 of the state's 38 districts.

The outbreak has been exacerbated by a heatwave, with temperatures in Patna, Bihar's capital, reaching a high of 45.8 Celsius (114.5 Fahrenheit).

"We're hoping with the onset of the monsoon, the epidemic will ease further," Kumar said.

More than 700 cases of encephalitis have been registered since the outbreak began June 1, officials said. Young children are particularly vulnerable to the illness, which can cause swelling of the brain, fever and vomiting.

The Supreme Court was responding to a petition filed by a lawyer. "The deaths of children are a direct result of negligence and inaction" on part of authorities, said Manohar Pratap, the petitioner.

The court expressed concern over the deaths and asked the governments to respond within seven days with details on [medical facilities](#), nutrition, sanitation and hygiene conditions in the state.

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

India's central government has sent [medical experts](#) to Bihar to help doctors treat the patients.

The Bihar authorities have been sharply criticized because patients were sharing beds in crowded hospital wards with too few doctors. The families who could afford it transferred their [children](#) to private hospitals in Patna and other larger cities.

The Press Trust of India news agency on Monday reported that about 6,000 deaths from encephalitis occurred in India between 2008 and 2014.

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