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Royal Government of Bhutan
Ministry of Health, Thimphu
Department of Public Health

"A Nation with the Best Health"



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Press Release

Leptospirosis Confirmed as Cause of ARDS Cluster in Dewathang

The Ministry of Health (MoH) informs the public that the recent cluster of Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) cases among the 69th batch of De-suup trainees in Dewathang has been confirmed to be caused by **leptospirosis**, based on laboratory confirmation and epidemiological evidence. The samples have been sent to higher centers outside Bhutan for reconfirmation.

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease transmitted primarily through contact with water or soil contaminated from infected animals. Human-to-human transmission is extremely rare, and the disease is not considered contagious between people under normal circumstances. Symptoms may include high fever, headache, muscle pain, and in more severe cases, complications involving the lungs, liver, or kidneys.

From the onset of the outbreak, the Ministry maintained a high index of suspicion for leptospirosis based on the clinical presentation and history of sporadic cases. This guided early case management and testing strategies. Samples tested at the Royal Centre for Disease Control (RCDC), in collaboration with regional hospitals, confirmed the presence of *Leptospira* bacteria through serological testing (ELISA) and Microscopic Agglutination Test (MAT).

Of the 230 individuals in the cohort, 143 have reported symptoms and have been initiated on treatment in accordance with the clinical guidelines. Despite these efforts, the Ministry regrets to inform that three individuals have, unfortunately, passed away due to the illness. The Ministry extends our heartfelt condolences to their families and loved ones during this difficult time.

Public Health Response

The Ministry activated the Health Emergency Operations Center (HEOC) to coordinate rapid response to the outbreak, including outbreak investigation at the field. All individuals were assessed and managed accordingly:



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- Those with mild to moderate symptoms were treated with appropriate antibiotics and isolated.
- Severely ill patients were transferred to ICUs and isolation wards.

In addition, the following measures are also being conducted:

- The Surveillance Team has contacted all affected individuals and their families to ensure comprehensive follow-up and care.
- Active case detection and surveillance activities will be continued to monitor and prevent further spread.
- All health facilities nationwide have been alerted to ensure early detection and treatment of suspected cases.
- Standard infection control precautions are in place in all hospitals.
- All De-suups from the cohort are being gathered at an identified facility in Thimphu for effective monitoring and management.

Public Advisory

The Ministry urges the public especially for people living in the southern belt to take the following precautions:

- Avoid wading through floodwaters or stagnant water that may be contaminated with animal waste.
- Practice good personal hygiene, including regular handwashing with soap and water.
- Seek immediate medical attention if experiencing symptoms such as high fever, headache, muscle pain, redness of eyes, or difficulty breathing.

The Ministry assures the public that all necessary interventions are being implemented to manage the situation and provide quality care. We continue to monitor developments closely and will provide updates as more information becomes available.

