

## **‘Throat, stomach, eye infections on the rise in city due to deteriorating environment’**

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Public health experts and physicians on Monday reported a sharp increase in infectious diseases in Karachi during the last couple of days, and attributing extremely hazardous environmental conditions to the rising stomach, chest and throat infections, warned that the city could face outbreaks of deadly infectious diseases in the coming days.

“Karachi is on the verge of an environmental catastrophe due to the dumping of organic matter on roads, which contains millions of types of bacteria and they are multiplying due to favourable conditions in the city. These pathogens are causing all kinds of infectious diseases from skin allergies and infections to stomach ailments, throat and chest infections, as well as problems of eyes,” said Dr Qaiser Sajjad, a renowned ENT specialist and secretary of the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), while talking to The News.

Other experts, including gastroenterologists, ophthalmologists (eye specialists) and dermatologists, also reported a sharp increase in infectious diseases and blamed the unhygienic and poor environmental conditions for the deadly outbreaks, warning that the authorities should be ready for more outbreaks of deadly infectious diseases in the days to come.

“The entire city is stinking as if we are living in a huge garbage dump full of filth and rotten organic matter. This is due to the decomposition of organic matter as well as the burning of garbage within the city limits, which is producing and multiplying all kinds of bacteria, fungi and viruses. These pathogens can cause a serious health issue for millions of Karachiites,” Dr Sajjad warned.

He said a large number of people with different types of nasal allergies, asthma, throat and chest infections were visiting OPDs of public and private hospitals and clinics these days due to environmental conditions, but he deplored that the majority of people in Karachi were least concerned about cleanliness as nobody had resorted to any protest over unhygienic conditions in their neighbourhoods.

### **Organic matter**

Hundreds of tons of organic matter, including offal and blood of sacrificial animals, is getting decomposed at every nook and corner of the city and providing excellent breeding conditions to millions of types of bacteria, viruses and other pathogens, eminent microbiologist Dr Shahana Urooj Kazmi said, adding that these pathogens were causing air and water pollution and contamination with each passing day.

“The enteric tract of animals contains the highest number of bacteria and other pathogens and when they are left open they provide excellent breeding places for bacteria and other pathogens. These pathogens are getting airborne and causing all kinds of infectious diseases to human and animals, which are passing these infections to others,” she told The News.

Dr Kazmi was of the opinion that deadly organic matter containing highly infectious pathogens was not only polluting the air in the city but it was also getting into the water through various sources. She added that the water being supplied to the people in Karachi was also contaminated and could result in deadly waterborne diseases.

### **Gastroenteritis cases**

Gastroenterologists and general physicians from various public and private hospitals complained that diarrhea and gastroenteritis cases were on the rise immediately after Eidul Azha in Karachi and urged the people to use boiled water and safe food to avoid getting infectious diseases.

“Diarrhea and gastroenteritis cases have been on the rise for last few days due to contaminated water and infected food, especially areas of low socio-economic group people. We are advising people to improve hygienic conditions around their living places, use clean and boiled water for drinking and eat home-cooked food,” Dr. Shahid Ahmed, a senior gastroenterologist, said.

### **Eye infections**

Ophthalmologists warned that Karachi could be gripped by infectious eye diseases due to poor environmental and unhygienic conditions, saying conjunctivitis (pinkeye or an inflammation of eye due to infection) cases had been reported from different areas of the city during the last few days.

“I have seen several cases of conjunctivitis during the last couple of days and the probable reason is the growing environmental pollution caused by extremely worst hygienic conditions in the city. I would advise people to take precautionary measures, especially children and elderly who are at a greater risk of catching these eye infections,” Dr Abdul Qadir, an ophthalmologist, said.

### **Sepa ‘not responsible’**

Despite the poor environmental conditions in the city, the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) said it was not responsible for the cleanliness of the city and the responsibility to improve the city’s environmental conditions, including the lifting of garbage and offal, was that of the municipal authorities and the mayor of the city.

“Deterioration of environment due to lack of cleanliness is the responsibility of the mayor and DMCs and we cannot be held responsible for that,” said the recently appointed director general of Sepa, Muhammad Saleem Raza, while talking to The News when he was asked about the deterioration in the environment due to poor hygienic conditions in Karachi.

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