Poor rubbish collection hatching more dengue menace

By Kasun Warakapitiya

The Colombo Municipal Council’s failure to collect garbage is worsening the spread of dengue, Central Epidemiological Unit Director Dr Paba Palihawadana said. About 4,500 dengue cases and eight deaths were reported in the country since early this month. Colombo has the highest dengue population with major breeding spots being Maligawatta West, Cinnamon Gardens, Kirulapone, Bambalapitiya, Wellampitiya, Modera, Mattakkuliyawewa and Punchi Borella. This year in the Colombo municipality area, 383 cases were found—slightly higher than last year when 321 cases were reported.

Dr Palihawadana said unless the authorities take immediate action to rectify the problems in garbage collection and disposal the dengue menace would increase. He pointed to how people keep garbage in polythene bags hung on gates and fences until they are collected.

“These bags sometimes are not collected for days, making them an ideal breeding spot for mosquitoes,” Dr Palihawadana said, adding that the public should also take responsibility for this.

Religious places—particularly Buddhist temple grounds—and schools in the Western Province are prime breeding grounds, authorities say. “There is 50-50 chance that a school is a dengue-positive site and a 50 per cent that religious places are dengue breeding sites,” the Ministry of Health’s National Coordinator for Dengue, Dr Hasitha Tissera said.

Last year, 783 individual dengue breeding offenders were fined up to Rs. 2.6 million and action was taken against 300 public institutions.

“We need a strategic dengue management system in hospitals,” Dr Tissera said pointing out that dengue patients are kept in wards in the same way as other patients so that mosquitoes that attack them can take the virulence to other patients. “Patients should be kept inside nets and hospital authorities should ensure that dengue breeding places are removed,” he said.

Dr Tissera said if the dengue patient is kept in a hot ward the mosquitoes that attack them can take the virulence to other patients.

The Colombo Municipal Council’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr Ruwan Wijemuni, said Buddhist temples have been found to be major breeding areas for mosquitoes.

The council has initiated comprehensive strategies to tackle the increase of mosquitoes, including those that spread other diseases such as meningitis. Dengue mosquito also carries chikungunya, yellow fever and zika bacillus (see separate story on zika).

“We are also hoping to import a mosquito catcher known as the Mega Catcher where a large number of mosquitoes can be destroyed using a unique system,” Dr Wijemuni said.

Dengue is a viral infection spread mainly in the daytime, particularly in the early hours after dawn and for 2-3 hours before darkness.

**Symptoms**

**Dengue Fever (DF)**:

- High fever
- Rash
- Loss of appetite
- Headache
- Pain behind the eyes
- Muscle and joint pains
- Nausea
- Vomiting

**Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever (DHF)**:

Can bleed in very little water. Can die in 1-2 days.

**Dengue Shock Syndrome (DSS)**:

- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Headache
- Muscles and joint pain
- Rash
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Headache
- Muscles and joint pain
- Rash

**Prevent mosquito bites**

- Use only pesticides and burns skin
- Use mosquito nets
- Sleep under mosquito nets
- Use mosquito repellent

**Anti-mosquito chemicals are harming us**

The rising mosquito population has led to an equivalent surge in the use of chemicals, posing a new public threat. Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) Chief Medical Officer Dr Ruwan Wijemuni said the eradication was difficult as one mosquito could produce up to 1,000 progeny during its lifetime, with half of them being females that could lead to the population increasing to more than four million in the next generation.

“The CMC is spending over Rs. 40 million on chemicals to kill mosquitoes,” the doctor revealed. Residents in and around the CMC say they use Rs. 23 million worth of mosquito coils a year as well. All these chemicals cause allergic reactions and asthmatic conditions.

A mosquito coil seller in Maligawatte, Ganesh David John, said sales of coils have increased, with people buying entire boxes of the product at a time. Last month, he sold 15 large boxes of coils, each containing 60 small packages, and this month he sold 25 boxes.

Maligawatte resident Umair Rahuman said he uses up to two coils daily to keep mosquitoes away.

Six-year-old Mohamed Isahan is an example of the prevalence of the disease. The little boy said he did not want to become infected with dengue fever ever again. He has been struck twice by the fever and his parents have now stopped him from playing outside with his friends, fearing he would fall victim again.

A mosquito catcher known as the Mega Catcher where a large number of mosquitoes can be destroyed using a unique system.

Dengue mosquitoes came into the country in 1987-1990 when vehicle tyres were imported to the country from Thailand. With global warming, the dengue population has drastically increased during the past years.

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