**Monsoon maladies and necessary precautions**

**New Delhi: 28th August:** The rains may have brought with them a much-needed respite from the heat, but they also bring along some diseases. The dramatic change in weather during and post-monsoon results in a range of health concerns. Taking adequate precautions are one of the best ways to avoid monsoon-related ailments.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee **Dr. KK Aggarwal**, President Heart Care Foundation of India & Honorary Secretary General Indian Medical Association said, “What most people do not realize is that the monsoon season brings with it a host of diseases and necessary precautions must be taken. Diseases like dengue, malaria, are easily preventable if adequate measures are taken.”

Here are the top five post monsoon illnesses, which one can prevent:

**1. Dengue Fever:** Dengue fever is a disease caused by viruses that are transmitted by mosquitos. It is spread by what’s known as the tiger mosquito (Aedes Aegypti), which has black and white stripes and typically bites early in the morning or at dawn. These mosquitoes are also known to spread the Chikungunya fever virus. The symptoms include severe joint and muscle pain, swollen lymph nodes, headache, fever, exhaustion and rashes. Because a virus causes dengue fever, there is no specific medicine or antibiotic to treat it. For typical dengue fever, the treatment is directed toward relief of the symptoms. The acute phase of the illness with fever and myalgias lasts about one to two weeks. Given the painful nature of the disease, prevention is essential.

Preventive measures: Unfortunately, there aren’t any drugs available to prevent the virus. As it’s transmitted via mosquitoes, one should use a strong insect repellent containing DEET to prevent mosquito bites. People should also wear full sleeve clothing when out in the day. It is important to remember that the dengue mosquito usually bites only in the day time and breeds in clean, fresh water. So any water accumulation should be checked for.

**2. Malaria:** One of the most common monsoon-related diseases, malaria, is caused by the Anopheles mosquitoes breeding in the dirty water. It is characterized by fever, bodyache, chills, and sweating. If untreated, it can lead to jaundice, severe anemia or even liver and kidney failure.

Preventive measures: Take an antimalarial drug such as mefloquine, atovaquone/proguanil, or doxycycline. Also take measures to prevent mosquito bites such as the use of mosquito repellents and wearing full sleeve clothing. Dirty water must not be allowed to accumulate to prevent malaria mosquito breeding.

**3. Viral fever:** Sudden weather change often causes viral fever characterized by fatigue, chills, bodyaches and fever. The illness is communicable and spreads through infection droplets in the air or by coming into physical contact with infected secretions. It lasts from 3 to 7 days, with the severity of the fever being the highest in the first three days. Respiratory symptoms tend to develop later on and can include a cough and in severe cases pneumonia. Staying in wet clothes for long periods and prolonged exposure to humid air from air-conditioners increase your chances of catching a cold.

Preventive measures: One must ensure that they do not get wet in the rain or stay in wet clothes for a long period, wash their hands often, boost their immunity by eating vitamin C-rich foods and green leafy vegetables. They must also keep a distance from an infected person. Given that viral fever spreads rapidly thought the air, if found to be suffering from the illness people should control side effects and symptoms using OTC drugs in consultation with their doctor.

**4. Food Poisoning:** Gastroenteritis and food poisoning are quite common during the monsoon season, and the high humidity helps in the growth of disease-causing bacteria.

Preventive measures: While eating out, keep in mind that soups, pastas and other such foods, which are supposed to be served hot, must not be allowed to become lukewarm, which is ideal for the growth of bacteria. It is applicable for frozen foods like ice cream as well which must be served completely frozen and ensure that melted ice cream is not refrozen since this could lead to food poisoning. Try and avoid eating raw food like salads because it is difficult to ascertain whether they have been washed, cleaned and stored at the right temperature before being served. Also don't go for chutneys and sauces since they are stored at room temperature and are loaded with harmful microorganisms. High sugar content and milk makes for an ideal environment for bacterial growth. Avoid eating roadside foods including panipuri, which may be made in contaminated water and trigger diarrhea.

**5. Allergies and Hay Fever:** Many trees start pollinating from September to October, triggering seasonal allergies among people. Common symptoms include inflammation in the lining of the nose and eyes. Allergic bronchitis, which affects the lung area can induce breathing problems.

Preventive measures: Allergy symptoms can be treated to a certain extent by taking anti-allergy and antihistamine drugs. Those who suffer from asthma should always carry their inhaler.