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Media alert from the Media Scanning & Verification Cell, IDSP-NCDC.

Alert ID	Publication Date	Reporting Date	Place Name	News Source/Publication Language
7231	03.02.2023	03.02.2023	Kolkata West Bengal	The Times of India English Newspaper 03 <sup>rd</sup> February, 2023/Page No. 18
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Kolkata chickenpox deaths worry doctors, West Bengal</b>			
Action By CSU, IDSP -NCDC	Information communicated to DSU – Kolkata, SSU- West Bengal			

A single hospital in the city has reported 26 deaths from chickenpox over the last three months, the highly unusual spurt in fatalities causing concern among state health officials.

Chickenpox, a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella zoster virus, is rarely fatal, with only around 1 death per 1,00,000 cases among children aged 1-14 years; 6 per 1,00,000 cases in the 15-19 age group; and 21 per 1,00,000 cases in adults, experts said. Most deaths in adults occur among the immunocompromised.

Some doctors attributed the spurt in deaths — reported from the Infectious Diseases & Beliaghata General (ID&BG) Hospital, the state's only referral hospital for infectious diseases — to a rise in the number of infections.

The latest victim was a 67-year-old man, who was shifted there early this week from the School of Tropical Medicine, Kolkata. A double-digit death figure from chickenpox in three months was highly unusual before Covid. The ID&BG hospital usually saw less than 10 deaths in peak chickenpox season, between November and February,

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Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), National Centre for Disease Control,  
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sources at the hospital said. During the height of the pandemic, this fell even further because of long periods of quarantine and people being more careful.

Kausik Chaudhuri, the Covid-19 nodal officer at ID&BG Hospital, said Covid-appropriate behaviour, such as avoiding crowded places and masking up, protected the general population against chickenpox as well, since it spreads through “not only skin contact, but also through droplets and aerosol from an infected person”.

In most patients, chickenpox causes itchy skin rashes and painful blisters, accompanied by fever. After Covid, however, doctors are seeing an increasing number of patients with brain and lung involvement — leading to encephalitis and pneumonia — complications that are not new, but rare. “The number of affected as well as fatalities is unusually high this time,” a health official said. “But those who succumbed to the infection were mostly the elderly and those battling several comorbidities,” he added.

Yogiraj Ray, an infectious diseases specialist, confirmed that those most vulnerable to severe chickenpox complications were those with comorbidities or immunocompromised patients.

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