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**Headline:** Pakistan on Alert Amid Global hMPV Outbreak as Experts Urge Calm

**Shoulder:** Healthcare experts emphasise that human metapneumovirus (hMPV) is not a new phenomenon in Pakistan and urge precautionary measures like masking and hygiene.

Mahtab Bashir

ISLAMABAD: In the wake of a global alert triggered by the Human Metapneumovirus (hMPV) outbreak in China, healthcare experts in Pakistan are urging calm among the public.

Healthcare experts emphasise that there is no immediate cause for concern, but recommend taking precautionary steps, especially for at-risk groups like the elderly and children.

Meanwhile, the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) is set to convene on Tuesday, January 7, to evaluate the situation and devise a strategic response to hMPV.

This virus, akin to the strain observed in China, was first identified in Pakistan in 2001. While hMPV has been recognized globally for over six decades, it was initially diagnosed in 2000. Health experts indicate that the virus tends to spread at a slow pace.

Talking to WE News English, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar, Vice Chancellor of the National Skills University, Islamabad and a virologist, reassured that the situation in Pakistan is not currently one of widespread panic.

He noted, “The rapid spread of hMPV in China has raised global concerns. This respiratory virus, known as human metapneumovirus, is often likened to the coronavirus. However, it is not a new virus; its symptoms resemble those of a common cold, including fever and upper respiratory issues. While it has been spreading in China post-COVID, it is not doing so with great intensity.”

***Pakistan's National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) is set to convene on Tuesday, January 7, to devise a response to the hMPV outbreak.***

He emphasized the importance of awareness in Pakistan and recommended precautionary measures, such as wearing face masks, as a primary step.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) in Pakistan has disclosed that the hMPV, which is currently surging in China, has actually been circulating in Pakistan for more than twenty years. According to the NIH, hMPV cases have been recorded in the country since 2001, including a notable report of 21 cases at Islamabad's PIMS hospital in 2015.

The Pakistani government is closely monitoring the situation in China, where the virus is spreading quickly as a meeting of the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) has been called on Tuesday to assess the situation and take necessary steps. The NIH clarified that the World Health Organization (WHO) has not issued any advisory regarding the HMPV virus yet.

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ishtiaq from the Microbiology department at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) in Islamabad shared that hMPV cases are fairly common. Currently, seasonal influenza, particularly types A and B, is also making the rounds in Pakistan, with several cases reported.

Although hMPV has been lurking globally for over six decades, it was only identified in 2000. Dr. Ishtiaq emphasized that this virus has a slow spread.

He urged individuals displaying symptoms like severe coughing, chest pain, a runny nose, fever, and breathing difficulties to seek medical attention promptly, especially for the elderly and children, who should be taken to a hospital without delay.

Dr. Ishtiaq highlighted that hMPV, a respiratory virus mirroring flu-like symptoms, poses a serious threat. It can lead to complications like bronchitis or pneumonia, particularly in vulnerable populations such as the young and the elderly. “While there’s no vaccine for HMPV yet, it remains a contagious virus, transmitted through respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing,” he warned.

***Health experts urged individuals showing symptoms like severe coughing, chest pain, a runny nose, fever, and breathing difficulties to seek medical attention immediately, especially for the elderly and children.***

An official from the National Institute of Health (NIH) Pakistan said that hMPV cases have surged in China since December 2024, with the US also observing cases starting in April 2024. While the virus is confirmed to be active in China, no significant outbreaks have been recorded in other countries.

“This surge in respiratory infections has set off alarm bells in nearby countries such as India, Indonesia, and Japan, prompting authorities to advise their citizens to take essential precautions,” the official explained. He noted that as winter progresses, Chinese officials are confident that the situation is under control, urging both residents and visitors to remain watchful without succumbing to panic.

**Is hMPV similar to Covid 19?**

HMPV, human metapneumovirus, is a respiratory illness that causes infection in the upper and lower respiratory tracts. This is termed as a seasonal disease and is pretty similar to the common cold and flu. hMPV is not new like Covid-19.

Both are respiratory viruses that can affect people of all age groups especially – kids, the elderly and people with weakened immunity. hMPV and Covid-19 are contagious and can spread via droplets, contact, touching an infected person or object.

A few symptoms of hMPV and Covid-19 are similar too- high fever, cold, cough, sneezing, shortness of breath etc. Other symptoms of hMPV are nasal congestion and fatigue. This may further progress to pneumonia or bronchitis too. However, there is no vaccine for curing hMPV completely.

**China hMPV Virus Outbreak – Key Updates**

After alarming videos and posts surfaced internet about rising cases of hMPV in China, Beijing issued a press statement to address the situation. China’s foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that “Respiratory infections tend to peak during the winter season”. I can assure you that the Chinese government cares about the health of Chinese citizens and foreigners coming to China”, adding that “It is safe to travel in China”.

**Symptoms and Precautions for HMPV**

Cough

High Fever

Nasal congestion

Shortness of breath

Bronchitis or pneumonia in severe cases may develop.

**Preventive Tips**

Wash hands often with soap and water.

Eat immunity boosting diet

Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Patients with cold-like symptoms should cover their mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.

Mask up when going to crowded areas.

Taking precautions can lower the risk of developing seasonal allergies and illness.

Keywords: Pakistan, **hMPV Outbreak**, China, Healthcare Experts, Illness,