

# Liver diseases silent, don't ignore symptoms

**national  
hepatitis  
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**NEW DELHI:** When north Delhi resident Anil Kumar, 45, got high fever in August this year, he thought it was normal flu. He consulted a doctor when the fever didn't subside even after a couple of days.

"The doctor gave me medicines and my fever came down. A few days later, however, I observed the colour of my urine had turned dark. I consulted my doctor again and he asked me to get a liver function test done," says Kumar, a civil engineer, who works for a Gurugram-based company.

Kumar was diagnosed with jaundice, and since his liver parameters were unusually off the charts, he was advised admission to a hospital.

"I didn't have any pain in the abdomen or any other symptoms but since the test readings were alarming I got admitted to a local hospital. The tests confirmed viral Hepatitis E on August 12. By evening of that day I was feeling worse," he says.

The doctors recommended he be shifted to a bigger hospital after he started losing consciousness the next day.

"I got admitted to BLK Hospital and investigations began and it was diagnosed that I had acute liver failure. Only 50% of my liver was functioning," he says.

Kumar recovered initially but from August 18, his condition got worse and he was advised liver transplant.

"In just a span of days, my liver was so damaged that I had to undergo a liver transplant. I was shocked. I didn't know my liver was in such a bad state. I have never had any symptoms," he says.

Fortunately for Kumar, he received timely treatment and from Monday he will resume work.

"What is important to note in his case is that he didn't waste time. We mostly get cases too late and that affects the treatment outcome. Time



• Doctors say by the time symptoms for conditions like hepatitis appear, 50% damage has already been done. **ISTOCKPHOTO**

## PREVENTION

**Testing:** Of blood and blood products and organ donors routinely; of expectant mothers as part of antenatal screening

**Awareness:** About safe use of needles, especially in intravenous drug users; promoting safe sexual practices and use of barrier contraceptives such as condoms

**Vaccination for hepatitis B:** Of newborns at birth and two doses later, especially of infants born to infected mothers

is of essence in such cases," says Dr Sanjay Singh Negi, director, department of hepato-pancreato-biliary surgery, BLK Hospital.

"It's usually Hepatitis B and C that's considered more dangerous but in a small proportion of cases, even A and E can lead to rapid liver damage," he said.

Doctors say, most of the liver diseases are silent and by the time symptoms appear there is already 50% or above damage done to the liver, and cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver set in, especially in viral Hepatitis B and C.

Liver cirrhosis is one of the major contributors towards developing liver cancer.

"In cirrhotic cases, tumor may develop any time. In fact, in at least 70% of the cases cirrhosis leads to liver cancer, which is one of the fastest growing cancers," says Dr SK Sarin, director, Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences.

Vaccination is the key to

control infection from spreading. However, there is vaccine to prevent only Hepatitis B.

Keeping in mind the magnitude of the disease, government of India also introduced Hepatitis vaccine in its Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP), to vaccinate newborns and protect them against the deadly disease.

An effective vaccination programme plays an imperative role in preventing HBV infection and is known to decrease the incidence of chronic liver disease and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) or liver cancer.

To provide protection to babies, the government is giving three primary doses of the vaccine at 6, 10 and 14 weeks, and to cut mother-to-child transmission, government had introduced the birth dose that is given within 24 hours of birth.

To protect against Hepatitis C, however, there is no vaccine but the infection can be cured with treatment that can last for three to six months. Doctors put a lot of emphasis on screening as timely treatment can prevent the liver from getting damaged beyond repair. Since faulty lifestyle, which includes lack of exercise, increased intake of junk food and excessive alcohol consumption, is one of the contributing factors for developing Hepatitis, it will help improve one's lifestyle.

"Faulty lifestyle, primarily excessive alcohol in take, is one of top indications for liver transplant in India. So, people must lead a healthy lifestyle," says Dr Negi.