

Delhi belly? Blame it on dirty water

BEWARE Contaminated water causes severe health problems – from common stomach infections to cancer

HT Correspondent

htreporters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Cold water or iced juices appear tempting in the sweltering heat but it often comes contaminated with bacteria, viruses, minerals and heavy metals, which not only cause gastro intestinal trouble but also skin and eye disorders.

Gunjan Sharma, 22, a PR professional learnt her lesson the hard way, and now she is so conscious about the quality of water she consumes that even her golgappas are filled with mineral water.

"I had once consumed regular water from outside and suffered for a week with gastroenteritis. To this day, I only drink mineral water when I'm out," she said.

Waterborne diseases are infectious diseases that spread primarily through contamination. They spread either directly from drinking or coming into contact with unsafe water or through flies or filth.

"Most intestinal (enteric) diseases are infectious and are transmitted through faecal waste that contains pathogens - which include viruses, bacteria, protozoa, and parasitic worms," said Dr Umesh Kapil, professor, Gastroenterology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

These disease-causing germs travel through water sources and interfuse directly through people handling food and water.

"Since these diseases are highly infectious, extreme care and hygiene should be maintained by people looking after an infected patient. Hepatitis, cholera, dysentery, and typhoid are the most common waterborne diseases," Dr Kapil said.

A study aimed at assessing water and hygiene-related attitudes and practices, and quality of water in urban slums of south Delhi was done in July 2013 by Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi.

Around 83% participants perceived gastrointestinal tract infection as the most important health problem. Seventy-five per cent participants did not use treat water before drinking it. Forty-five per cent participants consumed water from privately-owned tube well/ borewells.

According to the study, water shortage lasted two days or more at a stretch with severe scarcity occurring twice a year. About 45% participants had toilets within their households. About 53% drinking water samples collected from storage containers showed positive bacteriological contamination. Women aged 15 years and above were largely responsible (93%)



Waterborne diseases are infectious and spread either directly from drinking or when an individual comes into contact with unsafe water through flies.

RAJ K RAJ/HT PHOTO

for fetching water, found the study done across four urban slums of south Delhi.

Industrial and biological pollution are the main reasons for water contamination in India, say experts.

"Rivers and water bodies are contaminated with toxic chemicals such as cadmium, arsenic and lead in industry effluents that poison our lungs and brain. The government does not factor in public health while drafting policies for environmental pollution. Public health cannot work in isolation. It should also be linked with water contamination and air pollution and people must be trained and educated about it," said professor TK

Joshi, director, Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health at Maulana Azad Medical College.

"The UK has adopted four simple measures to keep environmental pollution under control and this policy has been rated as one of the best methods to keep the environment clean. The four measures include adequate amount of clean drinking water for every citizen, safe disposal of waste, proper nutrition for the citizens and planned and proper housing for all its citizens," said Dr Joshi.

Contamination of drinking water supplies can occur at the source as well as in the distribution system.

"Water contamination also leads to fungal infection of the feet and toes, bacterial infection leading to boils all over the skin and the commonest thing among children is viral warts," says Dr RK Joshi, skin specialist at Indraprastha Apollo hospital.

"Protozoan infection or acanthamoeba infection in the eye could be caused due to contamination of water. It can develop in people who usually wear contact lenses. Apart from this fungal and bacterial infections in the eye due to water are common," said Dr JS Titiyal, professor, RP Centre of Ophthalmology, AIIMS.

The reverse osmosis (RO) system is the best method to treat water and keep it safe.

NEXT

How contaminated is the Yamuna and the effect of the river's pollution