

BMC'S BLUFF CALLED ON YELLOW WATER

Cholera count goes up to 15

Instances Sporadic: Municipality

Sumitra Deb Roy & Linah Baliga | TNN

The BMC has assured people that the coloured water being received in many parts of the city is safe. But doctors and water experts are questioning the civic body on this contention.

The yellow tinge in the water is caused by iron, magnesium and chlorine if they cross permissible limits. Doctors say prolonged intake of these elements in such concentrations is damaging for humans: excess chlorine causes stomach irritation, among other gastric problems; excess iron and magnesium give rise to skin rashes and stomach ailments, besides other illnesses.

On BMC's announcement that the yellow water is fit for drinking, experts say the civic body's methodology for testing potability is flawed.

Dr Abhay Chaudhary, director, Haffkine Institute, said that merely clearing water of bacteria does not make it potable. "That the colour is (yellow to) green shows there could be other contaminants. These could be chemicals."

He said the institute has provisions for testing the potential of a sample of water to cause damage to skin and membrane. "I am not sure if the BMC subjected its samples to such tests."

While the BMC has found the concentration of chlorine in the water samples to be 0.65 mg/l against a permissible limit of 0.2 mg/l, it has not been able to ascertain the levels of the other two elements. It got its water samples tested at Geo-Chem Laboratories, Kanjurmarg.

Experts, as well as residents who have been receiving tinged water in their taps, have also questioned the BMC on the samples it collected for testing. They want to

know if the civic body collected samples from the consumers' end in addition to relying on samples from the reservoirs. "I do not think so," said BJP leader in the BMC and standing committee member Ashish Shelar. "I do not recollect the civic body collecting samples from taps."

The BMC's answer to the query posed by the residents will determine the source of the contamination, but it seems it will take some time to come. V P Deshpande, hydraulic engineer in the civic body, said: "The samples were collected from the reservoirs and not from taps in homes. We still can't pinpoint the cause (or source) of the colouration. But the reservoir samples are showing that the water is potable."

"The civic health department collects water samples from the wards. If there was contamination at the local level, the department would have informed us and we would have stopped supply. Local contamination, thus, is ruled out."

TOXINS IN THE TAP

Excess **iron** consumed continuously for 10-15 days gets deposited in tissue and organs, leading to a condition called hemochromatosis, commonly known as iron overload. Untreated, it causes damage to the organs. Symptoms include fatigue, weight loss and joint pain

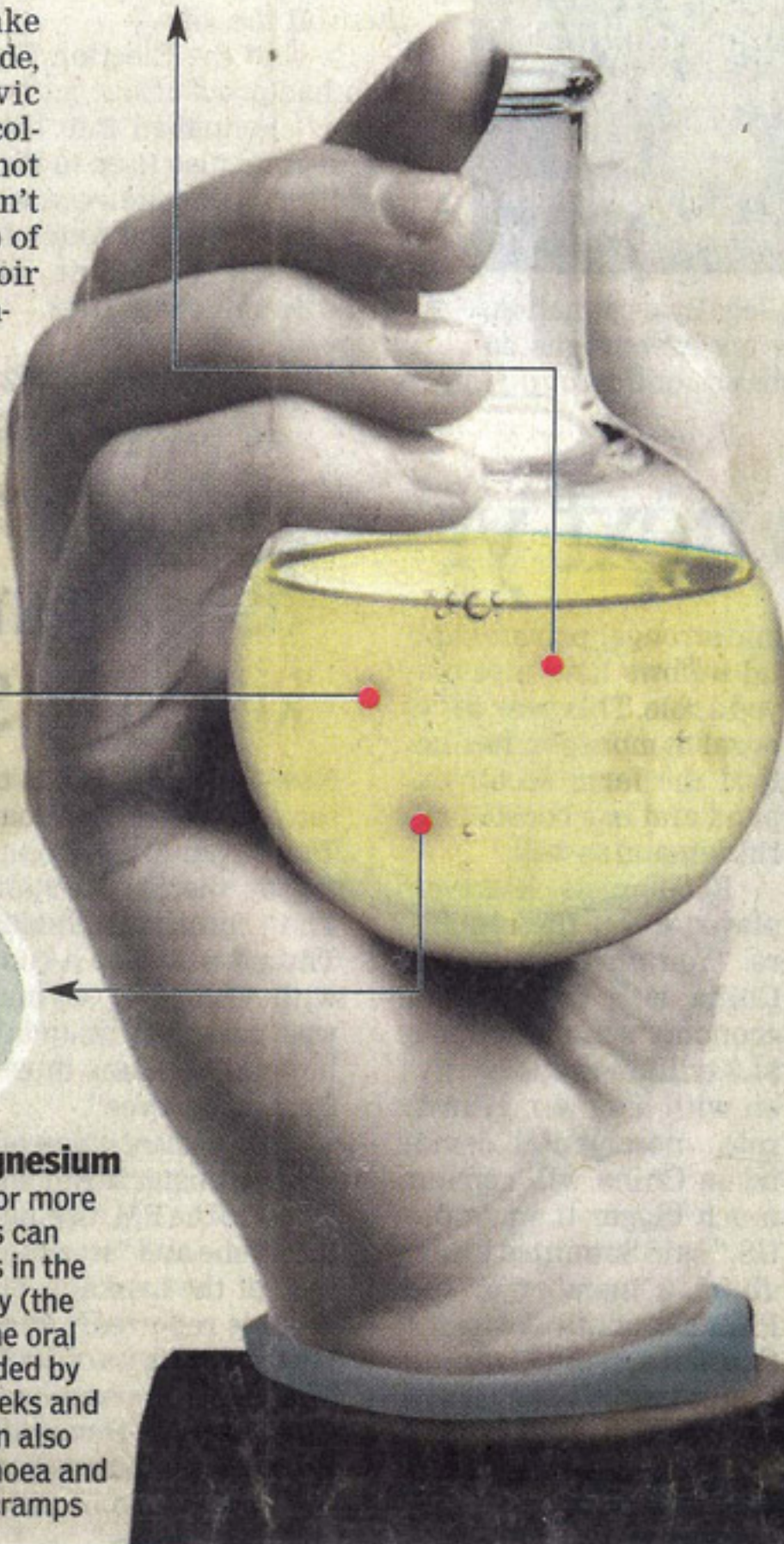
Fe

Cl

Mg

Consuming water dissolved with **chlorine** beyond permissible limits over time causes chronic acidity. In extreme cases, it also gives rise to ulcers, among various other gastric problems

Excess **magnesium** consumed for more than 15 days can cause ulcers in the buccal cavity (the portion of the oral cavity bounded by the lips, cheeks and gums). It can also cause diarrhoea and abdominal cramps



Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

Mumbai: After 12 children tested positive for cholera, as reported by TOI on Tuesday, three adults have been found suffering from the disease. But the BMC continues to downplay fears that there could be an outbreak, calling the 15 cases sporadic instances.

Authorities at Guru Nanak Hospital, Bandra (East), said on Thursday that three adult patients had been transferred to the Kasturba Hospital, Chinchpokli, after their samples were found to be positive in the hanging drop test, the preliminary investigation to confirm cholera.

"Since it is a notifiable disease (a disease that is required by law to be reported to government authorities), we did not want to take chances," said Dr Sachin Kale, chief medical officer, Guru Nanak Hospital.

Kale said that every day the hospital gets five to eight patients who complain of loose motions, stomach cramps and vomiting. "They mainly come from Bandra (East), Khar and Santa Cruz. Only a few of them, found to be in a serious condition, are hospitalized. The others are treated in the OPD and sent home."

Interestingly, the BMC continues to insist that only five people—four of them children—and not 15, have been found with cholera after the initial test. Dr Daksha Shah, head, epidemiology, BMC, said she is awaiting the culture test reports of the five to confirm them as cholera patients. "There is

no reason for panic. These are sporadic cases. The problem is typical of cities which have an overwhelming slum population. It does not mean that the whole of Mumbai is at risk of an outbreak."

Meanwhile, cases of diarrhoea, or gastroenteritis, are on the rise. "Our records show that we have treated 30 patients with diarrhoea symptoms in two weeks," said Dr Monica Goel, consultant physician, PD Hinduja Hospital. "The cases of gastroenteritis are not se-

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Dr Daksha Shah | BMC

vere, though the disease is unusual in the winter."

Hepatitis is another concern, affecting children and adults alike. Paediatricians say the infection is normal for this time of the year. Dr Alka Jadhav, in charge of the paediatric division of gastroenterology at Sion Hospital, said: "We find at least one child suspected of hepatitis—mostly A and E—in the OPD daily."

In adults, the condition is more prolonged. Dr Akash Shukla, gastroenterologist, KEM Hospital, said: "The incidence of viral hepatitis among adults is on the higher side."