

## Diagnostic network to detect fungal infections on anvil

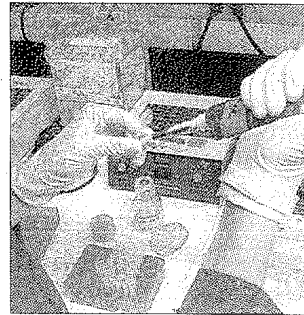
**NEW DELHI:** As life-threatening fungal infections often go undiagnosed despite affecting lakhs of Indians, public health researchers plan to set up a nationwide network of 1,000 laboratories to pick undetected cases, besides creating a database on the disease burden to fight the silent health threat.

Fungal infection kills 150 people every hour worldwide and is a major public health threat in India. But the government does not have any data on the disease burden though these infections are common here because of conducive climate and sub-opti-

mal hospital care. A study conducted by health researchers at Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in 27 intensive care units in large hospitals shows 10 out of every 1,000 ICU patients develop fungal infections with 50 per cent mortality, said Arunaloke Chakrabarti, professor and head of the department of medical microbiology at PGI.

The unpublished research work red-flags the extent of the health problem.

"Besides weather, a large number of patients in public hospitals, misuse of antibiotics and steroids by the quacks are



some of the common causes behind fungal infections," Chakrabarti told *Deccan Herald*.

Fungal eye infections, too, are a common occurrence in India. In a recent report from

Madurai alone, 139 such cases were recorded in just three months. In stark contrast, South Florida recorded 125 cases over a span of 10 years, and Philadelphia reported only 24 cases over nine years.

Up to 60 per cent fungal infections eventually kill the patient, a majority of which can be prevented with timely diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

With support from the Indian Council of Medical Research and two international non-governmental outfits named Global Action Fund for Fungal Infections and Leading International Fungal

Education, medical researchers intend to set up a network of laboratories to detect the disease.

In the last seven years, PGI developed 71 diagnostic laboratories in the country and since 2010 Sri Ramachandra University at Chennai also is conducting one training programme every year.

"For India, we need at least 1,000 laboratories because of the high hidden burden of fungal infections," he said.

Even from the limited data, India's high disease burden of invasive fungal infections are evident.

Among the three major

fungal infections in Indian hospitals, blood infection candida happen in 300-500 patients every year at any tertiary care hospital with approximately 1,500 beds. This is more than the total rate of the entire Australia put together.

Another fungal infection called mucormycosis—commonly seen in diabetic patients—occurs in 50 patients every year at most hospitals. This is more than half of the total mucormycosis cases reported annually from all the European countries put together.

**DH News Service**