



## SFTS Infection in China

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### Why in News

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Recently, deaths and infections have been reported due to the **Severe Fever with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (SFTS)** in **East China's Jiangsu and Anhui provinces.**

The new health threat emerges amidst the ongoing **Covid-19 pandemic** which also emerged in China first.

### Key Points

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- SFTS is caused by the **Severe Fever with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome Virus (SFTSV)** which belongs to the *Bunyavirus* family and is transmitted to humans

through **tick bites.**



- A **tick** called **Asian Longhorned Tick (*Haemaphysalis longicornis*)** is believed to be the **primary vector** (carrier) of the virus.
- The virus is often **transmitted to humans from animals** like goats, cattle, deer and sheep and **regular contact with these animals makes farmers, hunters and pet owners vulnerable** to the disease.
- Despite being infected by the virus, **animals generally do not show any symptoms** associated with SFTSV.
- **Origin and Spread:**
  - The virus was **first identified in China over a decade ago** and the **first few cases** were reported in rural areas of Hubei and Henan provinces **in 2009.**
  - Researchers identified the virus by **examining blood samples obtained from a cluster of people exhibiting similar symptoms.**
  - The virus eventually **travelled to other East Asian nations**, including **Japan and South Korea**, significantly raising the total number of cases.
  - **Due to more awareness about the health risks posed by tick bites**, the fatality rate of the infection has started to drop significantly.
- **Incubation Period:**
  - It is the **interval between being infected and showing symptoms.** For SFTS, the incubation period is **anywhere between 7 and 13 days.**
  - The disease usually **spreads between March and November** and the total number of infections generally **peaks between April and July.**

- **Symptoms:**

- Fever, fatigue, chill, headache, nausea, myalgia (muscle pain), diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal pain, gingival haemorrhage, conjunctival congestion, etc.
- **Early warning signs** include severe fever, **thrombocytopenia** (low platelet count) and **leukocytopenia** (low white blood cell count).
- More **serious cases** include multi-organ failure, hemorrhagic manifestation and the appearance of symptoms related to **Central Nervous System (CNS)** diseases.

The CNS consists of the **brain and the spinal cord** and it controls most functions of the body and mind.

- **Prevention:**

- **Avoid wearing shorts** while walking through tall grass, the woods, and any other environment where ticks are likely to thrive.
- **Using tick-repellent lotions and sprays** on the exposed body parts.

- **Treatment:**

There is **no vaccine to treat the disease yet**. However, the **antiviral drug Ribavirin is known to be effective** in treating the illness.

Ribavirin is also used to treat **Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever (CCHF)** which is also **transmitted by ticks**.

- **Current Case Fatality Rate:**

- It rests between **approximately 16%-30%**.
- SFTS has been **listed among the top 10 priority diseases blueprint** by the **World Health Organisation** (WHO) due to its fast spreading rate and high fatality rate.
  - **WHO's Research and Development Blueprint** identifies diseases and pathogens that have the **potential to cause a public health emergency but lack effective treatments and vaccines**.
  - This watchlist for priority research and development includes **Ebola**, several other hemorrhagic fevers, **Zika**, **Nipah**, **Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)** and **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)** and **disease X**, which represents the need to prepare for an **unknown pathogen** that could cause a serious epidemic.

**Source: IE**