El Niño-linked dry spell helped TN's dengue decline: Health Director

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News

DT Next reported on 23 November 2026 that El Niño conditions and a prolonged dry spell have helped slow dengue in Tamil Nadu. This is not a scientific study; it is the view of Dr A. Somasundaram, Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine. He said the absence of rain reduced mosquito breeding and that El Niño contributed to the dry conditions. Fresh infections, which were 700–1,000 a day at the monsoon peak, have fallen to about 250–300 a day in November. The State's tally for the year crossed 30,000 as of 22 November, up from 17,049 in mid-September, so the monsoon months added about 13,000 cases; he said more than 45,000 cases were reported two years ago. Chennai, Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu had higher incidence during the monsoon, so surveillance and vector control were stepped up there. With the north-east monsoon still active in parts of the State, officials said field work to find and remove stagnant-water breeding sites will continue.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Said by	Dr A. Somasundaram, Director of Public Health, TN
Claim	Dry spell + El Niño → less mosquito breeding
Nature	An official's view; not a separate scientific study

Point	Details
Daily cases	700–1,000 at peak → 250–300 in November
2026 total	Over 30,000 (till 22 November); 17,049 in mid-September
High-incidence districts	Chennai, Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram, Chengalpattu
Minister's data (Sep 2026)	2023: 56,863; 2024: 46,971; 2025: 25,585

Background

- Dengue is a viral disease spread by Aedes mosquitoes. Symptoms include fever, headache, pain behind the eyes and joint–muscle pain; in severe cases platelets fall and bleeding may occur. There is no specific drug; early care and adequate fluids save lives.
- Climate–disease link: temperature, humidity and rain affect both mosquito breeding and virus multiplication. A study by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune (GeoHealth, Sep 2026) found that in Keralam El Niño years bring warmer pre-monsoon conditions and higher dengue risk – showing that the effect can differ from place to place. The IITM–ICMR-NITVAR study also found that humidity and the day–night temperature range give up to five months' warning of dengue, temperature and El Niño two to three months, and monsoon rain an immediate signal – a basis for a climate-based early-warning system.
- The Indian monsoon is shaped not only by Pacific conditions but also by Indian Ocean phenomena. Tamil Nadu gets a large part of its annual rain from the October–December north-east monsoon, so dengue here also tends to rise in October–December.
- National programme: the National Center for Vector Borne Diseases Control (NCVBDC) of the Union Health Ministry tracks dengue. May is used for pre-monsoon awareness and July is observed as Anti-Dengue Month.

Tamil Nadu link: In September 2026 Health Minister K.G. Arunraj said dengue in Tamil Nadu had fallen for the third straight year (2023: 56,863; 2024: 46,971; 2025: 25,585). Tracking every fever case, reviewing every death, fever camps and mosquito-control measures are the State's strategies. During outbreaks the Tamil Nadu Government has distributed 'Nilavembu kudineer'.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Said by: Dr A. Somasundaram, Director of Public Health, TN; Claim: Dry spell + El Niño → less mosquito breeding; Nature: An official's view; not a separate scientific study; Daily cases: 700–1,000 at peak → 250–300 in November.

What is the background to this news?

Dengue is a viral disease spread by Aedes mosquitoes. Symptoms include fever, headache, pain behind the eyes and joint–muscle pain; in severe cases platelets fall and bleeding may occur.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. How many distinct serotypes of the dengue virus are known?

A) Two

B) Three

C) Six

D) Four

Answer: D – Explanation: Four – DENV-1 to DENV-4. Infection with one gives lifelong immunity only to that serotype; a later infection with a different serotype raises the risk of severe dengue.

2. The dengue virus is a flavivirus. Which disease is caused by a virus of the same family?

A) Chikungunya

B) Malaria

C) Japanese encephalitis

D) Filariasis

Answer: C – Explanation: Japanese encephalitis (spread by Culex); yellow fever and Zika are also flaviviruses. Chikungunya is an alphavirus; malaria a parasite.

3. 'Nilavembu kudineer', handed out in Tamil Nadu during dengue outbreaks, is based mainly on which plant?

A) Azadirachta indica

B) Ocimum tenuiflorum

C) Phyllanthus amarus

D) Andrographis paniculata

Answer: D – Explanation: Andrographis paniculata (nilavembu) with eight other herbs. Azadirachta is neem, Ocimum is tulsi, Phyllanthus is keezhanelli.

4. On which day is National Dengue Day observed in India?

A) 16 May

B) 20 August

C) 25 April

D) 1 December

Answer: A – Explanation: 16 May – pre-monsoon awareness (2026: 'Check, Clean and Cover'). 20 Aug is World Mosquito Day; 25 Apr is World Malaria Day.

5. In the WHO dengue guidelines, a rising haematocrit together with a rapid fall in which blood count is a laboratory warning sign of severe dengue?

A) Red blood cell count

B) Platelet count

C) Reticulocyte count

D) Eosinophil count

Answer: B – Explanation: Platelet count – a rapid fall in platelets with a rising haematocrit (a sign of plasma leakage) is a warning sign in the WHO (2009) guidelines; such patients need close monitoring and careful fluid therapy.