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SOUTH ASIA UNPREPARED TO ADDRESS EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Experts indicate South Asia is unprepared to address emerging, epidemic and spreading endemic pathogens, risking millions of lives and substantial economic potential

NEW DELHI – South Asia stands vulnerable to emerging infectious diseases, according to an analysis from CDDEP Director Ramanan Laxminarayan and colleagues. The analysis is published in *The BMJ* as part of a collection of twelve analyses on health in South Asia.

Examining the vulnerability to emerging and growing infectious disease threats and the capacity to respond to outbreaks, the analysis finds the level of preparedness is inadequate to protect public health across the region.

South Asia, defined by the World Bank as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, is home to a quarter of the world's population and bears a significant proportion of the global burden of infectious disease, with longstanding battles against tuberculosis, HIV and malaria. Emerging and growing infectious diseases, like Zika, Ebola, MERS-CoV, and avian influenza, are adding to the already significant burden of disease, and their spread may accelerate in the face of factors such as inadequate surveillance and uneven health system capacity.

The authors note that the current state of affairs appears to result from a severe policy neglect, including a general lack of commitment to the One Health approach in policy discourse, which would consider the interrelation of animal health, human health, and the environment.

The lack of preventive measures and surveillance has led to some previously sporadic diseases like Nipah virus and Chandipura virus becoming endemic in these countries. There has also been a marked rise in incidence, even as mortality rates have decreased, for some diseases.

According to CDDEP Director and review author Ramanan Laxminarayan, "With rapid shifts in urbanization and increasing population, South Asia has the opportunity and obligation to implement meaningful policy changes to prepare against emerging infectious diseases. Millions of lives are at stake and betting against the spread of emerging infectious diseases would be irresponsible."

The article is published in *The BMJ*, available here: <http://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1447>

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as the local and global aspects of global challenges, such as antibiotic resistance and pandemic influenza. CDDEP research is notable for innovative approaches to design and analysis, which are shared widely through publications, presentations and web-based programs. CDDEP has offices in Washington, D.C. and New Delhi and relies on a distinguished team of scientists, public health experts and economists.