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# WHO South-East Asia Regional Strategy for Nipah Virus Prevention and Control: a policy brief

Emerging diseases threaten the health and prosperity of South East Asia Member States. This policy brief describes the threat of Nipah virus, a high priority pathogen for WHO in the region, and actions that policy makers should consider to mitigate this threat.

## Why Nipah Virus Disease Matters

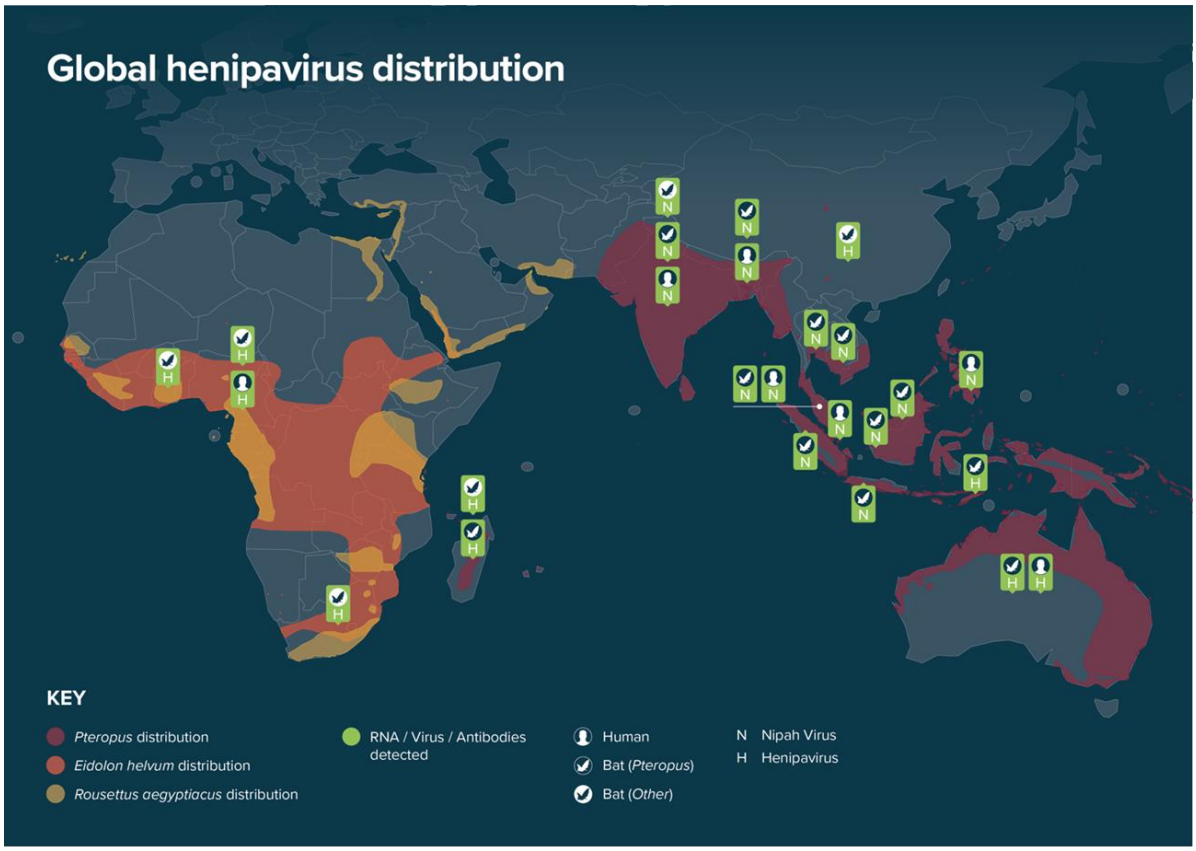


**Figure 1:** Global henipavirus and major host distribution. The map indicates countries where Nipah virus or another henipavirus has been detected in bats and/or humans. The maps also shows the home ranges for Pteropus species, Rousettus aegyptiacus, and Eidolon helvum, which have broad distributions and have been associated with henipavirus infection. (Courtesy: Dr Jon Epstein, Ecohealth Alliance, USA)

- ✓ Nipah Virus causes severe illness and death in humans and animals.
- ✓ The virus was first discovered in 1998 during an outbreak on a pig farm in Malaysia. Since then, outbreaks have been occurring almost every year in Bangladesh and India in WHO's South East Asia Region (SEAR).

- ✓ Outbreaks are deadly, killing 40-70% of people infected.
- ✓ As of now, there are no vaccines or drugs proven to work against the disease.
- ✓ The Nipah virus exists in nature inside fruit bats. It is part of a group of viruses (henipavirus), which may also cause disease in animals and humans.
- ✓ Almost all countries in South-East Asia are at risk of a future outbreak, because the fruit bats that carry it live in many countries of the region (**Figure 1**).

## Nipah Virus Can Be Controlled

- ✓ As of 2023, no drugs or vaccines are approved for Nipah Virus disease.
- ✓ Measures are needed to stop the virus from "spilling over" from bats into wild animals, domestic animals, humans, and/or food that humans and animals eat (**Figure 2**).

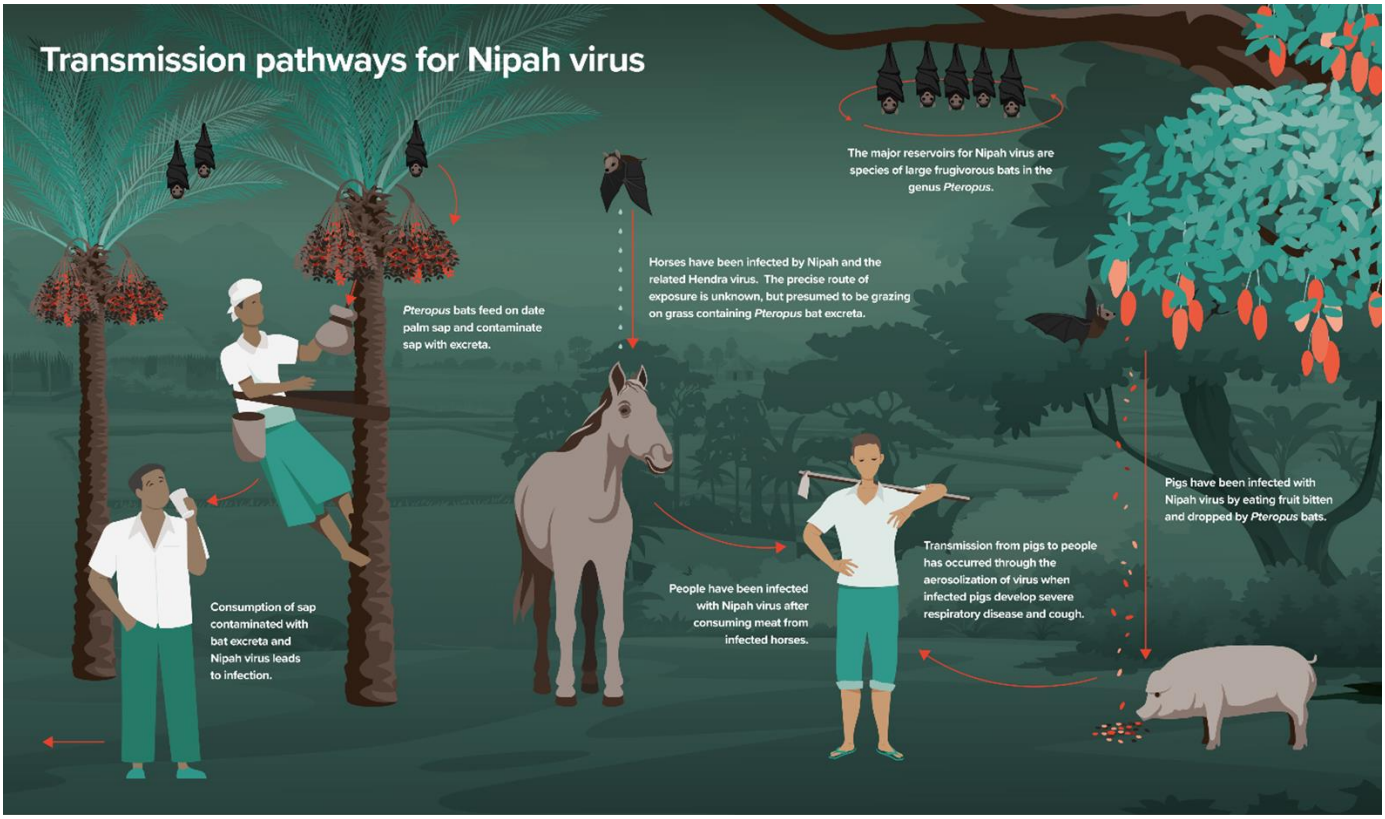


**Figure 2:** Transmission pathways of NiV between natural hosts and susceptible species. (Courtesy: Dr Jon Epstein, Ecohealth Alliance, USA)

- ✓ It is important to diagnose infections in wildlife, domestic animals, and humans early to protect the health of an infected person or animal and to stop transmission to others.
- ✓ It is important to strengthen infection prevention and control measures on farms and in healthcare facilities to stop the virus spreading from infected animals or humans to others.

## Why is a Regional Strategy Needed?

- ✓ Nipah Virus outbreaks are like fires. Until now, countries have primarily focused on detecting outbreaks early and trying to stop them – putting out fires.

- ✓ A Regional Strategy will help countries systematically reduce the frequency of outbreaks in the first place – preventing fires from happening.

- ✓ The purpose of the Regional Strategy is to help Member States in SEAR prevent severe illness and deaths due to Nipah Virus from 2023-2030.

- ✓ Not all Member States are at equal risk. The Regional Strategy helps Member States understand risk by guiding how to assess and mitigate the risk based on their specific context.

## Key Components and Outcomes of the Strategy

| | Strategy Component | Key Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | Improve understanding of socio-ecological aspects | Detailed national join risk assessments |
| **2** | Enhance policy, strategy and regulatory capacity | National preparedness and response plans |
| **3** | Increase multi-sectoral health system capacity and readiness for detection, early warning, and response to cases and outbreaks | National "One Health" response mechanisms protocols and teams |
| **4** | Enhance risk communication and awareness to reduce spillover and spread | Culturally-appropriate communication plans and messages to reduce spillover |
| **5** | Promote research and development | Stronger regional research consortiums |
| **6** | Promote behavioural changes to reduce risk | Reduced spillover through partnerships with local communities |
| **7** | Improve control of disease in domestic animals through enhanced biosecurity | Reduced transmission on farms |
| **8** | Increase laboratory diagnostic capability in human, animal, and wildlife sectors | Early detection and diagnosis of Nipah virus infections |
| **9** | Increase surveillance and information sharing among human, animal, and wildlife sectors | Enhanced early warning and timely joint response |
| **10** | Improve clinical diagnosis and case management | Reduced human-to-human transmission, severe illness, and death |
| **11** | Develop and improve access to medical countermeasures | Expedited access to medical countermeasures as they become available |
| **12** | Ensure resiliency | Rapid recovery of communities after outbreaks |

## Is This Worth the Cost?

- ✓ Preventing and controlling NiV requires strong, sustained political and financial commitment from Member States, WHO, and other key stakeholders.
- ✓ Consider money spent on the strategy an investment, not a cost. Analyses of the COVID-19, Ebola, Mpox, and other epidemics have shown us that investing in pandemic preparedness saves lives and money, boosting health and wealth.
- ✓ Investing in reducing NiV spillover, spread, illness, and death will strengthen preparedness, prevention, detection, response, and recovery to other high threat pathogens.
- ✓ Investments in NiV prevention and control can and should leverage investments related to COVID-19 and other emerging infectious diseases.