

Scrub Typhus: A Hidden Threat in the Shadows

“Rising cases of scrub typhus demand attention and vigilance”

Rakshita Sharma¹, Brij Vanita Thakur², Paras Saini³

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Veterinary Pathology, Khalsa College of Veterinary & Animal Sciences, Amritsar

²Subject Matter Specialist, DDE CSKHPKV, Palampur

³Consultant Pathologist, Vantara

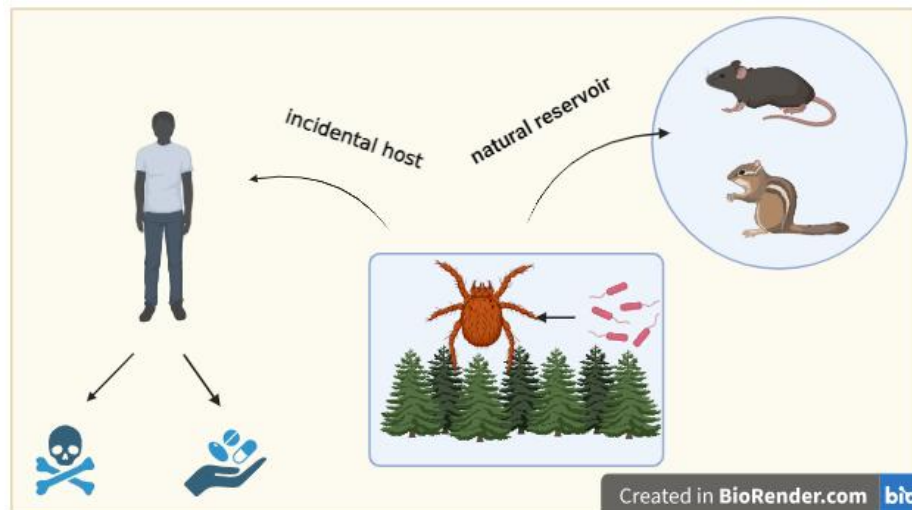
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Abstract

Scrub typhus is an important but often overlooked re-emerging zoonotic disease caused by *Orientia tsutsugamushi* and transmitted through the bites of infected chigger mites. It is mainly prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region, with increased transmission during the rainy season. The disease may present with fever, headache, muscle pain, rash, lymphadenopathy, and an eschar, and can progress to serious complications if diagnosis and treatment are delayed. Since no effective vaccine is currently available, prevention relies mainly on protective clothing, insect repellents, and personal hygiene. Increasing recognition of scrub typhus in new areas highlights the need for greater awareness, early diagnosis and effective preventive measures to reduce its health impact.

Introduction

Orientia tsutsugamushi, is gaining recognition for its prevalence and clinical significance in the Asia Pacific region. The disease, transmitted by chiggers feeding on rodents, poses a year-round risk, with heightened transmission during the rainy season. Often referred to as a "great imitator," scrub typhus manifests with symptoms such as high fever, severe headaches, muscle aches, and an eschar at the bite site. Complications affecting the heart, lungs, and blood may arise, emphasizing the need for early diagnosis and treatment. Although no vaccine currently exists, preventive measures include wearing protective clothing, using insect repellent, and practicing good hygiene. As scrub typhus extends beyond traditional endemic areas, global health concerns rise, necessitating international cooperation for understanding, prevention, and management. Awareness, prevention, and early diagnosis are crucial in mitigating the impact of this hidden threat, underscoring the importance of individual and collective efforts to protect against scrub typhus.



Etiology & transmission

Scrub typhus, a lesser-known but potentially life-threatening disease, is quietly making its presence felt across various regions, prompting health authorities to issue warnings and urging the public to take precautions. It is a vector-borne zoonotic infection caused by the bacterium *Orientia tsutsugamushi*, ranks among the prevalent and clinically significant rickettsial infections on a global scale. At present the presence of this disease is not uniform in all parts of the world. Geographically, it is limited to the Asia Pacific region. *O. tsutsugamushi* is spread by the larval stage of trombiculid mites, commonly known as chiggers, which feed on forest and rural rodents, including rats, voles, and field mice. Scrub typhus is transmitted to humans via the bites of chiggers (larval mites) that are infected with the disease.

It can affect people of all age. Scrub typhus fever can develop in individuals who have been in regions characterized by scrub vegetation, where rodents dwell. These areas may include forest clearings, riverbanks, grassy landscapes, deserts, and rainforests. Actually, there is a risk of scrub typhus disease throughout the year. But since the number of insects increases during the rainy season, the risk of being bitten by them also increases in this season.

Clinical manifestation & diagnosis

Scrub typhus is often described as a great imitator because its initial symptoms can be mistaken for many other illnesses. Scrub typhus symptoms appear 5-14 days after the bite, includes high fever, cough, severe widespread headaches, extensive muscle aches, lymphadenopathy, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, a skin rash and an eschar at the location of the insect bite and non-specific flu-like symptoms. Pneumonitis of varying degrees is frequently observed, and complications affecting the heart, lungs, and blood can occur, potentially resulting in compromised cardiac function and circulatory insufficiency. Early diagnosis is critical in managing scrub typhus. Physicians typically rely on clinical evaluation



and serological tests to confirm the presence of the disease. A delay in diagnosis and treatment can lead to serious complications and even death.

Prevention, control and emerging concern

While there is currently no vaccine available for this disease, individuals can take certain preventive measures to minimize the risk of contracting scrub typhus. While it may sound alarming, there are several measures individuals can take to reduce their risk of infection:

- When venturing into areas with tall grasses and vegetation, wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and closed shoes to minimize skin exposure
- Apply insect repellent on exposed skin
- Regularly wash your hands and body with soap and water to remove any chiggers that may be attached.

Conclusion:

While scrub typhus has been relatively obscure compared to other infectious diseases, its rising prevalence beyond traditional endemic areas raises global health concerns. Climate change, urbanization, and increased human activity in previously uninhabited areas may contribute to the disease's spread. Health authorities worldwide are now closely monitoring scrub typhus, as it has the potential to cause outbreaks in new regions. This highlights the importance of international cooperation in understanding, preventing, and managing this disease. Scrub typhus may not be a household name, but its potential to cause serious illness cannot be underestimated. Awareness, prevention, and early diagnosis are the keys to mitigating the impact of this hidden threat. Whether you're an outdoor enthusiast or simply concerned about your health, taking precautions and staying informed can go a long way in protecting yourself and your loved ones from scrub typhus.

