

Researchers from the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Virology have made a groundbreaking discovery in India by detecting the presence of the Clade 9 variant of the varicella-zoster virus (VZV) for the first time. VZV is a human herpes virus responsible for causing chickenpox, a highly contagious childhood illness characterized by an itchy blister-like rash. This virus can lead to severe complications, including central nervous system involvement. It spreads through contact with infected individuals, airborne transmission from sneezing or coughing, and contact with infected fluids. Certain populations, such as pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems, are at greater risk.

Facts/Terms for UPSC Prelims

- **Clade 9 Variant:** A specific genetic subtype or lineage of the varicella-zoster virus (VZV) with distinct genetic characteristics, possibly affecting its behavior or virulence.
- **α-Herpesvirus Family:** A family of herpesviruses, including VZV, that primarily infects humans and typically establishes latent infections in nerve cells.
- **Central Nervous System Involvement:** Refers to the invasion of the virus into the central nervous system, potentially leading to serious neurological complications, such as encephalitis.
- **Incubation Period:** The time between exposure to the virus and the appearance of symptoms, this can vary between 10 to 21 days for chickenpox.
- **Weakened Immune Systems:** Individuals with compromised immune function, making them more susceptible to infections, including those caused by VZV. This group includes infants, adolescents, adults, and pregnant women, highlighting the importance of vaccination and prevention strategies.