

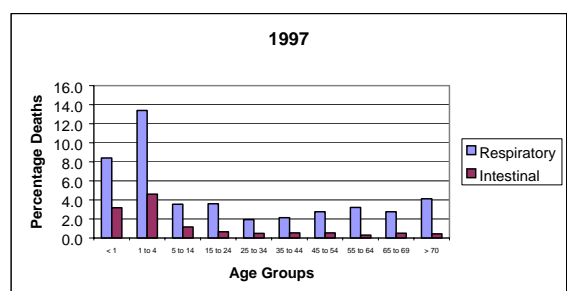
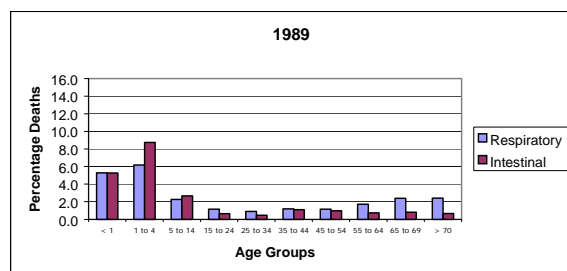
13. Environmental Health

13.1 Introduction

There is an urgent need to emphasise preventive approaches along with curative approaches in the management of health in Delhi. The city is facing a serious double burden of disease.

Sickness from water and vector-borne diseases re-occur annually. Meantime, there is evidence of increased exposure to toxic pollutants (particulates, pesticides, lead and other toxic metals) in the environment and a rising incidence of respiratory infections, cancer, heart problems, lead poisoning and other conditions.

Deaths due to intestinal infections and respiratory causes in Delhi 1989-1997



Source: Department of Health and Family Welfare, GNCTD

There is widespread agreement on the need to improve Delhi Government's capacity in environmental health management and monitoring under the guidance of a nodal agency to give far greater attention to preventive strategies. Effective environmental management requires the following:

- Realistic long-term and short-term goals

- Identification of health 'hotspots' and effective intervention therein (Environmental health profile of Delhi)
- Prioritisation of health management efforts
- Effective and focused implementation
- Review and reassessment of policy objectives

13.2 Objectives and Long Term Goals

Long term goals for environmental health can be expressed in two ways:

- To meet internationally accepted standards for ambient air pollution and key diseases as prescribed by the World Health Organisation. In the short term, pollution in the city should be reduced to at least meet national standards.
- To ensure universal access to safe, adequate basic services essential for health including housing, water supply, sanitation and household fuels.

In the short term there is a need to achieve institutional objectives that will make it possible to realise long-term (20 year) goals for disease prevention.

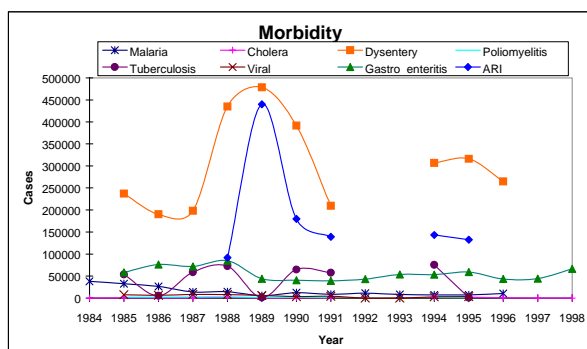
These institutional goals should relate to the development of a nodal agency to take lead responsibility for the co-ordination of environmental health management and monitoring functions.

Environmental Health Profile of Delhi

One of the objectives of environmental health management and monitoring in Delhi is to develop and maintain an environmental health profile that would identify areas that are critical in terms of environmental impacts on human health and those where improving health is a critical priority.

It is intended to provide information on spatial distribution of health "hotspots" and vulnerable populations (children, old people and low income groups) based on 'spatial' data on morbidity in Delhi.

The quality of morbidity data available for Delhi is inadequate. It is based on hospital returns resulting in gross under estimation of the scale of environmental health problems. The data produced does not reflect geographical variations in sickness across the capital and therefore cannot be used to identify environmental health hotspots. It is irregularly collected and variable and, as a result, of little value in planning or city management purposes.



Source: Department of Health and Family Welfare, GNCTD

13.3 Policy Framework

Based on the National Health Policy, certain guidelines on preventive health for Delhi may be indicated as follows

- industrial and urban development plans in consultation with the Central and State authorities.
- Regulation of emissions and pollution of air and water through legal measures, if necessary.
- Strengthening municipal authorities to identify and tackle local environmental health problems; establish a chain of sanitary cum epidemiological stations at the 'localised' level to plan and provide preventive services.
- Development of a health management information system to provide timely warnings against emerging health problems and for monitoring and evaluation ongoing health problems. (This would eventually be used in association with the proposed DPCC environmental monitoring data / MIS.)
- Health education and public awareness backed by appropriate communication strategies.

13.4 Institutional Framework

Government Health services in Delhi are at present fragmented, being managed by a number of agencies that work for the most part in isolation from each other. While these institutions recognise that the health of the population is determined largely by the environmental and development conditions within the state, they do not play any effective role in environmental and developmental decision-making for health promotion in the state.

Government departments and institutions need more co-ordinated efforts to exchange and manage information through a nodal agency at the GNCTD level that facilitates policy implementation and evaluation.

Environmental health is a multi-sectoral discipline and as such does not have an obvious institutional home. While it has a close link to curative health services it is also concerned with the consequences of urban environmental pollution (e.g. air pollution from transport, industrial pollution) and with the delivery and regulation of essential services such as water supply, sanitation and solid waste management.

In the course of this work, certain ongoing exercises and initiatives in environmental health were taken note of. These include: i) MCD's programme to enhance the control of communicable diseases in the capital as set out in the document 'Prevent 2000: Action Plan for Prevention of Epidemics in Delhi.'; ii) Environmental Prevention and Control Authority, and its remit is to solve the air pollution problem in the National Capital Region (NCR); iii) The World Bank funded IPP8 programme undertaken by the MCD incorporating an MIS for public health data; and iv) Environmental Health Committee established by the Ministry of Environmental and Forests (MoEF) in 1998 to recommend a nationwide environmental health research agenda.

It is the intention in the proposed institutional framework to build on these initiatives and optimise their efforts to an extent that the role of the nodal agency becomes even more facilitative.

13.5 Implementing the Institutional Framework

13.5.1 An Environmental Health Mission

Having considered various alternatives, it is generally agreed that the role of the nodal agency for this purpose can be performed by a 'Mission' at the GNCTD level, analogous to GoI Missions in some sectors.

More specifically, the Environmental Health Mission would be an interim body charged with achieving certain operational goals – not only doing research but implementing action plans. It could outsource some of its tasks (such as laboratory work) and would have close working relationships with government agencies, institutions and NGOs. Its location would need to be at a very senior level so that it could co-ordinate the work of other agencies and link to city management processes.

13.5.2 Objectives of an Environmental Health Mission

In the immediate to short term (0 – 2 years):

- Develop and update annually an environmental health profile of Delhi including relevant environmental, morbidity and mortality data disaggregated by ward or zone
- Identify specific links between local environmental factors and health, and locate 'hotspots'
- Recommend priorities for action to resolve environmental health problems

In the short term (0 – 5 years):

- Develop and co-ordinate an environmental health strategy for the capital

- Ensure that environmental health concerns receive due attention in the setting of priorities for government investment and action in the capital.

13.5.3 Composition of Mission

The mission could be structured to incorporate varied technical and managerial expertise. The mission structure could include a 'mission core' consisting of senior officials from the Departments of Health, Environment and Urban Development, Municipal Corporation of Delhi and Center for Occupational and Environmental Health who have influence at senior level and can enable collaboration with a wide range of government and non-government agencies.

The mission should also include a separate technical committee comprising of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals from fields such as epidemiology, environmental toxicology, environment and social sciences, public health and urban development. The mission would need a mechanism for continuous servicing in terms of inflow of data from governmental agencies such as the State Health Intelligence Bureau as well as non-governmental institutions.

13.6 Risks of Implementation

The success of the environmental health mission would lie in a number of factors such as bureaucratic initiative and support from the relevant experts and professionals.

Funding would also need to be assured. To date, preventive policies outlined in the National Health Policy have not been seriously adopted in Delhi, highlighting the need for political will if any recommendations arising from the Delhi 21 are to be followed.