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## Alarming Spread of Hepatitis E Revealed by Screening

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Recent screening efforts in Sindh have uncovered a troubling rise in Hepatitis E virus (HEV) cases, particularly in southeast districts, prompting urgent calls for improved sanitation and public health measures. This article examines the growing threat and the need for local action.

The Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) has raised alarms over the increasing prevalence of HEV, a liver infection spread primarily through contaminated water. Screening in districts like Tharparkar and Umerkot revealed a significant uptick in cases, with the World Health Organization (WHO) estimating 20 million global infections annually, 3 million symptomatic, and 56,600 deaths. In Sindh, poor sanitation and limited access to clean water fuel the spread, especially in rural areas. Dr. Qaiser Sajjad, PMA

Secretary-General, noted in a Dawn interview that inadequate water treatment facilities exacerbate the crisis, urging immediate infrastructure upgrades. Pregnant women face heightened risks, with mortality rates reaching 20–25% in the third trimester, a stark warning for Sindh's healthcare system.

The Sindh government's response has been criticized as sluggish, with federal oversight from Islamabad often disconnected from local realities. Posts on X highlight public frustration, with @HealthPak noting rising HEV cases in underserved communities, calling for grassroots solutions. Unlike hepatitis A, which a vaccine effectively curbs, no HEV vaccine is available in Pakistan, leaving prevention reliant on clean water access. The PMA stresses that boiling water and avoiding undercooked meat, particularly pork or wild game, can reduce risks, though cultural dietary habits in Sindh limit zoonotic transmission concerns.

This surge in HEV cases underscores the need for provincial autonomy in health policy. Centralized mandates often fail to address regional challenges like Sindh's water scarcity and sanitation deficits. Local leaders must prioritize community-driven initiatives upgrading water systems, enforcing hygiene standards, and educating residents over waiting for federal aid. The screening data is a wake-up call, demanding swift, practical action to protect Sindh's vulnerable populations from this preventable yet deadly disease.