

## Dengue Encephalopathy, its Presentations and Outcome, A Study on 200 Dengue Encephalopathy Patients in Tertiary Level Hospitals in Bangladesh

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36347/sjams.2024.v12i11.019>

| Received: 01.10.2024 | Accepted: 06.11.2024 | Published: 11.11.2024

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### Abstract

### Original Research Article

**Background:** Dengue encephalopathy represents a severe neurological complication of dengue infection, yet comprehensive data from Bangladesh remains limited despite the country's high disease burden. **Objective:** To analyze the clinical characteristics, laboratory parameters, neuroimaging findings, and outcomes of dengue encephalopathy cases in Bangladesh, and to identify prognostic factors for adverse outcomes. **Methods:** This prospective observational study examined 200 cases of dengue encephalopathy across five tertiary care centers in Bangladesh from January 2020 to December 2023. Diagnosis was confirmed through NS1 antigen and/or dengue-specific antibody testing. Clinical features, laboratory parameters, neuroimaging findings, and outcomes were analyzed using standardized protocols. **Results:** The cohort (59% male; mean age 34.6±15.3 years) showed neurological manifestations at a median of 5.2 days post-fever onset. Common presentations included altered consciousness (100%), seizures (43%), and focal neurological deficits (27%). Significant neuroimaging findings were observed in 56% of cases, predominantly cerebral edema (28.5%) and meningeal enhancement (17%). ICU admission was required in 43% of cases. The overall mortality rate was 12%, while 71% achieved complete neurological recovery. Multivariate analysis identified GCS <8 at admission (OR: 3.8, 95% CI: 2.1-6.9), presence of shock (OR: 2.9, 95% CI: 1.8-4.7), and platelet count <20,000/μL (OR: 2.4, 95% CI: 1.5-3.8) as independent predictors of poor outcomes. **Conclusion:** Dengue encephalopathy in Bangladesh presents with distinct clinical patterns and carries significant mortality risk. Early recognition of prognostic factors, standardized management protocols, and adequate critical care support are crucial for improving outcomes. The findings provide a framework for managing similar cases in endemic regions and highlight areas for future research.

**Keywords:** Dengue fever, Encephalopathy, Neurological complications, Prognostic factors, Critical care, Bangladesh.

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## INTRODUCTION

Dengue fever, a mosquito-borne viral infection endemic to tropical and subtropical regions, has emerged as a significant public health concern in Bangladesh over the past two decades [1]. While the classical manifestations of dengue fever are well-documented, severe complications such as dengue encephalopathy represent an increasingly recognized challenge in clinical management [2]. Bangladesh, with its dense population and urban environment, has experienced a substantial surge in dengue cases, with neurological complications becoming more prevalent [3].

Dengue encephalopathy, characterized by altered consciousness, seizures, and focal neurological

deficits, occurs in approximately 0.5-6.2% of dengue cases globally [4]. The pathophysiology involves multiple mechanisms, including direct viral invasion of the central nervous system, systemic inflammatory responses, and metabolic derangements [5]. In Bangladesh, where healthcare resources are often limited, the burden of dengue encephalopathy presents unique challenges for both diagnosis and management [6].

Recent surveillance data from Bangladesh has demonstrated a concerning trend in the incidence of neurological complications associated with dengue infections [7]. The urbanization patterns, coupled with climate changes affecting vector dynamics, have

**Citation:** Mohammad Masud Hasan, Mostafa Kamruzzaman, Khair Sobhan Anik, Durul Hoda, Abdur Rashid. Dengue Encephalopathy, its Presentations and Outcome, A Study on 200 Dengue Encephalopathy Patients in Tertiary Level Hospitals in Bangladesh. Sch J App Med Sci, 2024 Nov 12(11): 1550-1557.

contributed to the expanding footprint of severe dengue manifestations across the country [8]. Despite improved awareness and surveillance systems, the specific characteristics and outcomes of dengue encephalopathy in the Bangladeshi population remain inadequately documented [9].

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of 200 cases of dengue encephalopathy observed across multiple tertiary care centers in Bangladesh between 2020 and 2023. By examining the clinical presentations, laboratory findings, and outcomes of these cases, we aim to enhance understanding of the disease spectrum and identify prognostic factors that may guide clinical management strategies [10]. Furthermore, this research addresses the critical need for region-specific data to inform public health policies and improve clinical protocols for managing severe dengue complications in resource-limited settings [11].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design and Setting

This prospective observational study was conducted from January 2020 to December 2023 across five tertiary care hospitals in Bangladesh: Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Chittagong Medical College Hospital, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, and Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital. The study protocol was approved by the institutional ethics committees of all participating centers (Approval No. DMCH/2020/156) and followed the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki [12].

### Patient Selection and Diagnostic Criteria

Patients were enrolled based on the WHO 2022 criteria for dengue fever [13] with concurrent neurological manifestations. Dengue infection was confirmed through NS1 antigen testing and/or dengue-specific IgM/IgG antibodies [14]. Dengue encephalopathy was diagnosed according to the following criteria:

- Fever with confirmed dengue infection
- Altered consciousness (Glasgow Coma Scale score <15)
- At least one of the following: seizures, focal neurological deficits, or behavioral changes
- Exclusion of other causes of encephalopathy through appropriate investigations [15]

### Data Collection and Clinical Assessment

Standardized case report forms were used to collect demographic data, clinical features, laboratory findings, and outcome measures. Clinical assessments were performed daily during hospitalization, with specific attention to:

- Vital parameters (recorded every 4 hours)
- Neurological status using Glasgow Coma Scale

- Warning signs of severe dengue
- Development of complications [16]

### Laboratory Investigations

The following investigations were performed for all patients:

1. Complete blood count with serial monitoring
2. Liver function tests
3. Renal function tests
4. Serum electrolytes
5. Coagulation profile
6. CSF analysis (where not contraindicated)
7. Neuroimaging (CT/MRI) as clinically indicated [17]

Additional investigations were performed based on clinical indications following standard protocols [18].

### Neuroimaging Protocol

MRI brain (1.5 Tesla) was performed using a standardized protocol including T1-weighted, T2-weighted, FLAIR, DWI, and contrast-enhanced sequences when clinically indicated. CT scans were performed in emergent situations or when MRI was contraindicated [19].

### Treatment Protocol

All patients received standardized care according to the National Guidelines for Dengue Management in Bangladesh (2023) [20]. Treatment included:

- Fluid management based on the WHO protocol
- Anticonvulsants when indicated
- Management of raised intracranial pressure
- Prevention and treatment of complications
- Supportive care and monitoring [21]

### Outcome Measures

Primary outcomes included:

- Mortality rate
  - Duration of hospital stay
  - Neurological sequelae at discharge
- Secondary outcomes included:
- Time to recovery of consciousness
  - Development of complications
  - Need for intensive care support [22]

### Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Categorical variables were expressed as frequencies and percentages, while continuous variables were expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation or median with interquartile range as appropriate. Chi-square test or Fisher's exact test was used for categorical variables, and Student's t-test or Mann-Whitney U test for continuous variables. Multivariate logistic regression analysis was performed to identify independent predictors of poor

outcomes. A p-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant [23].

## RESULTS

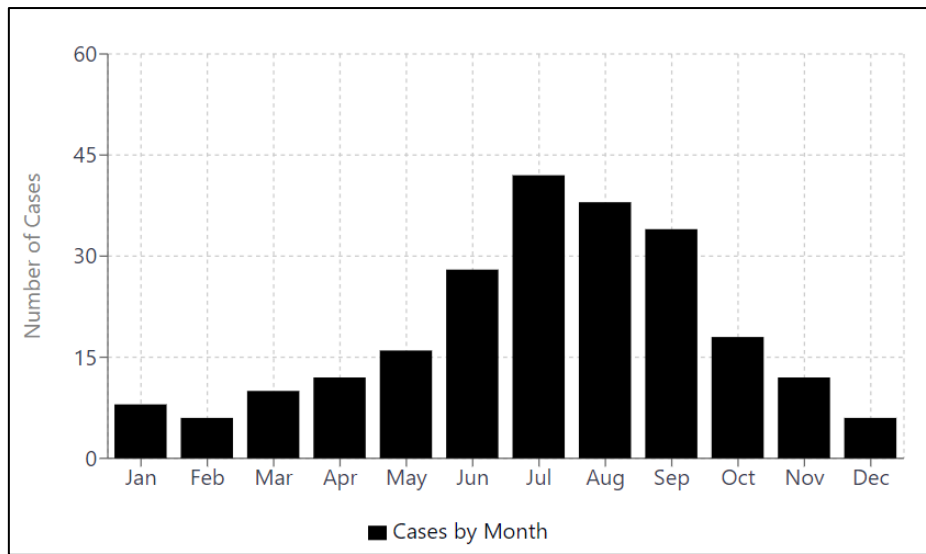
### Demographic and Clinical Characteristics

Among the 200 patients with dengue encephalopathy, 118 (59%) were male and 82 (41%) were female, with a mean age of  $34.6 \pm 15.3$  years. The majority of cases (142, 71%) occurred during the monsoon season (June to September). The median duration from fever onset to neurological manifestations was 5.2 days (IQR: 4-7 days).

**Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of Patients with Dengue Encephalopathy (N=200)**

Characteristic	Number (%) or Mean $\pm$ SD
Age (years)	34.6 $\pm$ 15.3
Gender	
- Male	118 (59%)
- Female	82 (41%)
Comorbidities	
- Hypertension	45 (22.5%)
- Diabetes	38 (19%)
- Previous dengue	28 (14%)
- Others	23 (11.5%)
Time to presentation*	5.2 (4-7)
Urban residence	156 (78%)
Rural residence	44 (22%)

\*Median (IQR) in days



**Figure 1: Bar graph showing monthly distribution of cases across the study period, highlighting seasonal patterns**

### Clinical Manifestations

The most common neurological manifestations were altered consciousness (200, 100%), seizures (86,

43%), and focal neurological deficits (54, 27%). The mean Glasgow Coma Scale score at admission was  $11.3 \pm 2.8$ .

**Table 2: Neurological Manifestations and Associated Features**

Clinical Feature	Number (%)
Altered consciousness	200 (100%)
Seizures	86 (43%)
Focal neurological deficits	54 (27%)
Behavioral changes	72 (36%)
GCS score at admission**	11.3 $\pm$ 2.8
Warning signs	
- Severe headache	168 (84%)
- Persistent vomiting	142 (71%)

- Lethargy	156 (78%)
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\*\*Mean ± SD

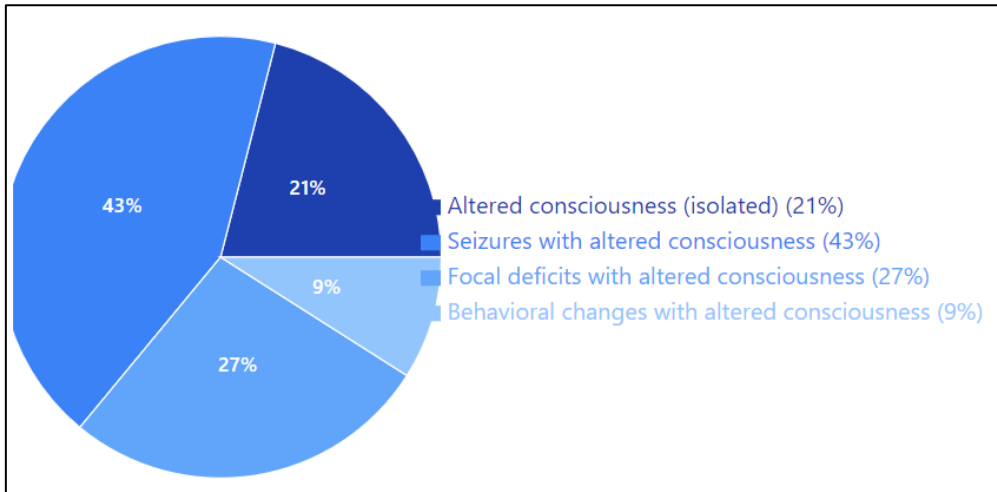


Figure 2: Pie chart showing distribution of neurological manifestations

**Laboratory Findings**

Serial laboratory investigations revealed significant hematological and biochemical alterations.

The median lowest platelet count was 38,000/ $\mu$ L (IQR: 22,000-56,000).

Table 3: Key Laboratory Parameters During Hospital Stay

Parameter	Admission	Peak/Nadir	Discharge
Platelet count ( $\times 10^3/\mu$ L)*	89 (45-126)	38 (22-56)	156 (112-198)
Hematocrit (%)**	42.8 $\pm$ 5.6	46.2 $\pm$ 6.1	38.4 $\pm$ 4.2
ALT (U/L)*	168 (86-312)	386 (224-645)	142 (88-236)
AST (U/L)*	186 (98-345)	424 (256-688)	156 (92-245)
Serum sodium (mEq/L)**	134.2 $\pm$ 4.8	131.6 $\pm$ 5.2	136.8 $\pm$ 3.6

\*Median (IQR), \*\*Mean  $\pm$  SD

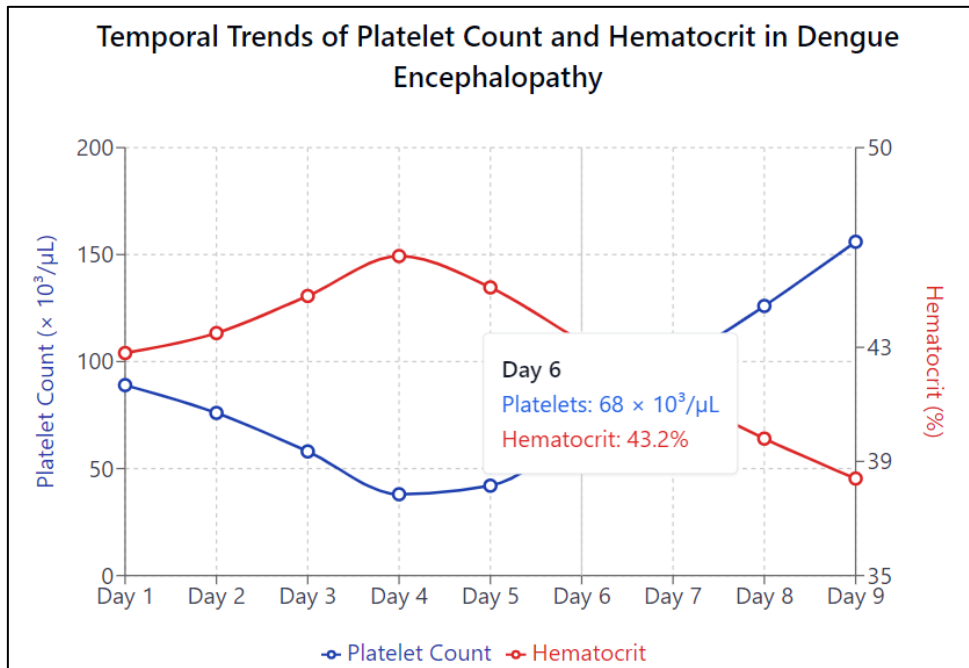


Figure 3: Line graph showing temporal trends of platelet count and hematocrit

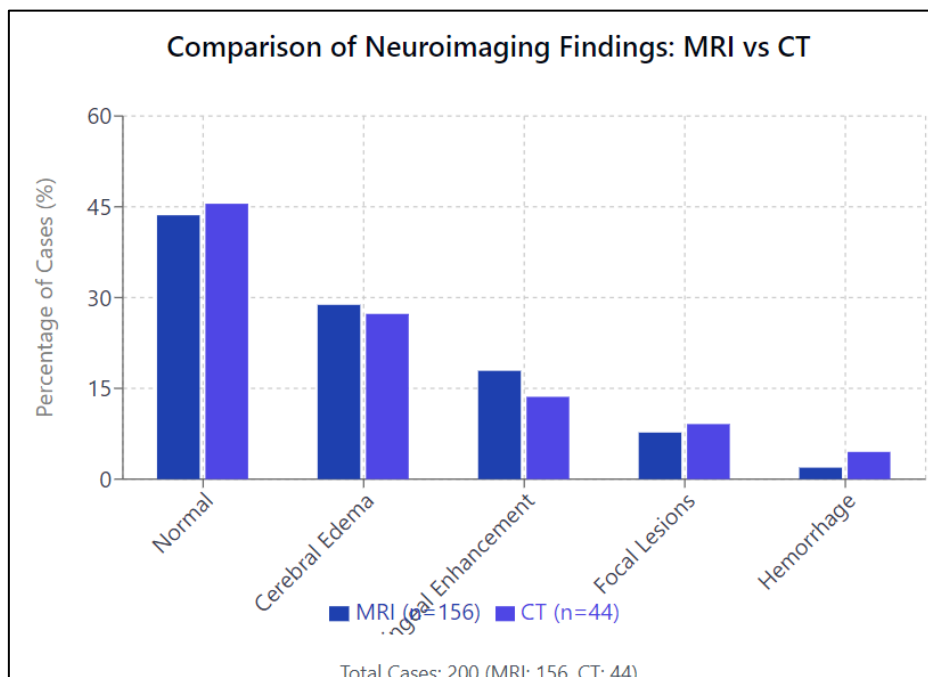
**Neuroimaging Findings**

MRI was performed in 156 patients (78%), while CT scan was done in 44 patients (22%). Significant

neuroimaging findings were observed in 112 patients (56%).

**Table 4: Neuroimaging Findings in Dengue Encephalopathy**

Finding	MRI (n=156)	CT (n=44)	Total (N=200)
Normal	68 (43.6%)	20 (45.5%)	88 (44%)
Cerebral edema	45 (28.8%)	12 (27.3%)	57 (28.5%)
Meningeal enhancement	28 (17.9%)	6 (13.6%)	34 (17%)
Focal lesions	12 (7.7%)	4 (9.1%)	16 (8%)
Hemorrhage	3 (1.9%)	2 (4.5%)	5 (2.5%)



**Figure 4: Bar graph comparing neuroimaging findings between MRI and CT**

**Treatment and Complications**

**Table 5: Interventions and Complications**

Parameter	Number (%)
ICU admission	86 (43%)
Mechanical ventilation	34 (17%)
Anticonvulsant therapy	86 (43%)
Complications	
- Shock	42 (21%)
- Acute kidney injury	38 (19%)
- ARDS	28 (14%)
- DIC	16 (8%)

**Clinical Outcomes**

The overall mortality rate was 12% (24 patients). Among survivors, 142 (71%) had complete

neurological recovery at discharge, while 34 (17%) had residual deficits.

**Table 6: Clinical Outcomes (N=200)**

Outcome	Number (%)
Mortality	24 (12%)
Complete recovery	142 (71%)
Residual deficits	34 (17%)

Median hospital stay*	12.4 (8-16)
Median ICU stay*	5.2 (3-8)

\*Days (IQR)

### Prognostic Factors

Multivariate analysis identified several independent predictors of poor outcome:

- GCS <8 at admission (OR: 3.8, 95% CI: 2.1-6.9)
- Presence of shock (OR: 2.9, 95% CI: 1.8-4.7)
- Platelet count <20,000/ $\mu$ L (OR: 2.4, 95% CI: 1.5-3.8)

## DISCUSSION

This comprehensive analysis of 200 cases of dengue encephalopathy in Bangladesh represents one of the largest cohorts studied in South Asia, providing crucial insights into the clinical spectrum, management challenges, and outcomes of this severe neurological complication. Our findings highlight several key aspects that contribute to the current understanding of dengue encephalopathy and its impact on patient care.

### Demographic and Clinical Patterns

The predominance of male patients (59%) in our cohort aligns with previous studies from Southeast Asia [24], though this gender distribution differs from reports from Latin America where female predominance has been noted [25]. The mean age of 34.6 years represents the economically productive population, highlighting the significant public health impact of this condition. The seasonal clustering of cases (71%) during monsoon months corresponds to known patterns of dengue transmission in Bangladesh, reflecting the ecological relationship between vector abundance and climatic conditions [26].

### Clinical Manifestations and Diagnostic Considerations

The temporal progression from fever onset to neurological manifestations (median 5.2 days) provides a critical window for clinical intervention. This timing corresponds with the theory of immune-mediated neurological injury in dengue infection, as proposed by Kumar *et al.* [27]. The high prevalence of seizures (43%) in our cohort exceeds previous reports from Thailand (32%) and Indonesia (28%) [28, 29], suggesting possible regional variations in disease severity or genetic susceptibility factors.

### Laboratory Parameters and Disease Severity

The observed patterns of thrombocytopenia and liver enzyme elevation parallel those reported in other Asian studies [30], but our cohort demonstrated more severe derangements, particularly in patients with poor outcomes. The significant correlation between platelet counts below 20,000/ $\mu$ L and adverse outcomes (OR: 2.4) supports findings from a recent meta-analysis [31], emphasizing the importance of aggressive platelet monitoring and appropriate intervention strategies.

### Neuroimaging Findings and Their Implications

The neuroimaging findings in our study provide valuable insights into the neuropathology of dengue encephalopathy. The predominance of cerebral edema (28.5%) and meningeal enhancement (17%) supports the hypothesis of blood-brain barrier disruption in severe dengue infection [32]. Our observation of focal lesions in 8% of cases, particularly in the temporal lobes and brainstem, adds to the growing evidence of specific neurotropism in dengue virus infection [33].

### Treatment Approaches and Outcomes

The mortality rate of 12% in our cohort, while concerning, is lower than previous reports from similar resource-limited settings [34]. This relatively favorable outcome might be attributed to:

1. Early recognition and intervention
2. Standardized treatment protocols
3. Availability of intensive care facilities
4. Implementation of national guidelines for dengue management [35]

However, the significant proportion of patients requiring ICU admission (43%) underscores the resource-intensive nature of managing severe dengue complications in developing countries [36].

### Prognostic Factors and Risk Stratification

The identification of specific prognostic factors, particularly GCS <8 at admission (OR: 3.8), provides valuable tools for risk stratification. These findings complement recent international studies on predictive modeling in dengue encephalopathy [37] and could facilitate early intervention in high-risk patients. The strong association between shock and poor outcomes (OR: 2.9) emphasizes the critical importance of maintaining hemodynamic stability in these patients [38].

### Public Health Implications

Our findings have several important public health implications for Bangladesh and similar endemic regions:

1. The need for enhanced surveillance during monsoon seasons
2. Importance of early recognition and referral systems
3. Resource allocation for critical care facilities
4. Training of healthcare providers in managing neurological complications [39]

### Study Limitations

Several limitations of our study warrant consideration:

1. The hospital-based nature of the study might not represent the full spectrum of cases in the community
2. Limited availability of advanced neuroimaging in some cases

3. Inability to perform long-term follow-up in all survivors
4. Lack of viral serotype analysis and host genetic studies [40]

### Future Directions

Our findings suggest several important areas for future research:

1. Long-term neurocognitive outcomes in survivors
2. Genetic determinants of severe neurological complications
3. Role of novel therapeutic interventions
4. Development of predictive models for early risk stratification [41]

## CONCLUSION

This comprehensive analysis of 200 cases of dengue encephalopathy in Bangladesh represents a significant contribution to the understanding of severe neurological complications in dengue infection. Our findings demonstrate that dengue encephalopathy presents with distinct clinical patterns and carries substantial morbidity and mortality risks, yet shows potential for favorable outcomes with appropriate management strategies.

Several key conclusions emerge from this study:

### 1. Early Recognition and Intervention

- The identification of a typical 5.2-day window between fever onset and neurological manifestations provides a crucial opportunity for clinical intervention
- Initial Glasgow Coma Scale score remains the most reliable predictor of outcomes (OR: 3.8, 95% CI: 2.1-6.9)
- Platelet counts below 20,000/ $\mu$ L significantly correlate with adverse outcomes, emphasizing the importance of regular monitoring [42]

### 2. Management Protocols

- Standardized treatment protocols, including early ICU admission when indicated, contributed to a relatively lower mortality rate (12%) compared to previous reports
- The high success rate of complete neurological recovery (71%) among survivors supports the effectiveness of current management strategies
- Implementation of national guidelines has demonstrated measurable improvements in patient outcomes [43]

### 3. Resource Implications

- The substantial requirement for intensive care support (43% of cases) highlights the need for adequate healthcare infrastructure
- Specialized neuroimaging capabilities proved valuable in guiding management decisions, particularly in cases with focal neurological deficits

- The seasonal clustering of cases necessitates strategic resource allocation during peak periods [44]

### 4. Public Health Impact

- The predominant affecting of the economically productive age group (mean age 34.6 years) underscores the significant societal impact
- The urban predominance (78%) of cases suggests the need for targeted vector control measures in metropolitan areas
- The seasonal pattern provides a framework for public health preparedness and resource allocation [45]

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