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Diseases in 'Factor X' could be next global threat – 16th November 2023

Level 0

There could be many deadly diseases underground in permafrost. Permafrost is in mountains and near the North and South Poles. Climate change is melting it. This could release unknown, harmful viruses. Scientists are calling these 'Factor X'. An infectious diseases professor said we know little about Factor X.

There are viruses in permafrost that are a million years old. A scientist said these "ancient viruses" could be terrifying. We have never seen them before. The scientist said deadly diseases like smallpox could be released. Factor X could be an even bigger problem. We need to learn more about Factor X.

Level 1

Old bacteria under the ground could contain many deadly diseases. The bacteria have been trapped in permafrost for thousands of years. Permafrost is long-frozen ground. It is common in mountains and near the North and South Poles. It is melting because of climate change. This could release unknown, harmful viruses. Scientists are calling these 'Factor X'. An infectious diseases professor said we know little about Factor X.

There are viruses in the permafrost that are up to a million years old. A virologist said these unknown, "ancient viruses" could be terrifying because we have never seen them before. He also said deadly diseases like smallpox could be released worldwide. Factor X could be an even bigger problem. However, scientists say the release of methane is a bigger danger from melting permafrost. Methane is 80 times more harmful than CO₂.

Level 2

Ancient bacteria under frozen ground could contain many deadly diseases. The microbes have been trapped for millennia in permafrost. This is ground that stays completely frozen for at least two years. It is common in mountains and near the North and South Poles. The permafrost is melting because of climate change. The result could be the release of unknown, harmful viruses. Scientists are calling these 'Factor X'. A professor in infectious diseases said we know little about Factor X and the biological dangers trapped in Earth's permafrost.

A virologist says there are viruses in the permafrost that are more than 50,000 years old. These could be harmful to humans. The virologist said unknown, "ancient viruses up to a million years old" could be terrifying because we have never seen them before. He added that deadly bacterial diseases like smallpox could be released worldwide. Factor X could be an even bigger problem. However, many scientists say the release of methane is a bigger danger from melting permafrost. Methane is a greenhouse gas that is 80 times more harmful than CO₂.

Level 3

Scientists say there could be something under frozen ground that contains many deadly diseases. Ancient microbes have been trapped for millennia in the permafrost that covers large areas of Earth. Permafrost is ground that stays completely frozen for at least two years. It is common high in mountains and near the North and South Poles. The scientists say the permafrost is melting because of climate change. The result could be the release of unknown, harmful viruses, which scientists are calling 'Factor X'. Birgitta Evengard, a professor in infectious diseases at a university in Sweden, said we know little about Factor X and the biological dangers trapped in Earth's permafrost.

Virologist Jean-Michel Claverie says there are viruses deep in the permafrost that are more than 50,000 years old. He said these could be harmful to humans. Professor Claverie said "ancient viruses up to a million years old" would be the most terrifying because they are unknown and we have never encountered them before. He added that deadly bacterial diseases like smallpox and anthrax could be released on a large scale. Factor X could pose even bigger problems. However, many scientists agree that a bigger danger from melting permafrost is the release of methane. This is a greenhouse gas that is 80 times more harmful than CO₂.