

Mysterious Sleeping Beauty Syndrome

There's something strange happening in Kazakhstan. Residents of the scarcely populated areas around Kalachi village are falling victim to a mysterious 'sleeping beauty' syndrome. The odd condition causes people to suddenly doze off for up to six days at a time. The illness has only affected this region and no one knows what causes it. Scientists are perplexed by the phenomenon.



The peculiar sleeping illness started in March 2013. Since then, a total of 40 to 60 people from the area have suffered. In most of the cases, the sleep is accompanied by short-term memory loss.

One of the first victims of the syndrome was Maria Felk, a 50-year-old milkmaid.

"I was milking my cows early in the morning, and fell asleep," she said. "I remember nothing at all. Only that when I woke up, I was in the hospital. The nurses smiled at me and said, 'Welcome back sleeping princess, you've finally woken up.' I don't remember anything else. I was asleep for two days and two nights. The nurses said that I tried to wake up several times, saying I must milk my cows."

It's interesting that the strange disease is not limited to locals. It affects visitors as well. 30-year-old Alexey Gom, who was visiting his mother-in-law in Kalachi was also struck by the illness.

"In the morning I wanted to finish my work," Alexey said. "I switched on my laptop, opened my work pages - and that was it. It felt like somebody pressed a button to switch me off."

"I woke up in the hospital," Alexey continued. "The doctor found nothing wrong with me. I slept for more than 30 hours. It never happened to me or to anyone from my family before."

There have been reports of people falling asleep for almost a week. It's feared that before the mystery sleeping condition was known, some people may have been buried alive!

Some people have had many episodes. A clothes vendor at the local marketplace has been a 'sleeping beauty' seven times. It's happened to her daughter twice, and has happened once to her 15-year-old granddaughter. Her coworkers at the market have all suffered from the syndrome at different times as well.

There's no knowing when the disease will strike, so most of the villagers always have a packed bag at hand, in case they need to be rushed to the hospital.

Some locals believe that it happens after a quick rise in the atmospheric temperature. Others believe that water from a nearby unused Uranium mine is seeping into the local rivers, and then being consumed by locals.

Scientists have performed over 7,000 tests on the area's soil and water, and also on the victims' blood samples, hair and nails. The tests proved that underground gas and local cell phone signals aren't the culprit.

Scientists tested homes and workplaces for viruses, bacteria, radon gas, high radiation levels and heavy metal salts. All the tests were inconclusive. According to a local doctor, "When a patient wakes up, he will remember nothing. The story is always the same - weakness, slow reactions, then fast asleep."

A couple of children who suffered from the sleep syndrome had hallucinations as well. One child said he saw his mother with eight eyes and a trunk. He also saw light bulbs and horses flying around him. Another child doesn't remember his dreams, but he did yell 'monsters!' quite a few times when he was asleep.

Sadly, there are no answers. However, Kazakhstan's Environmental Protection and Water Resources minister has pledged to find out the cause of the outbreak.