

The Times of India 26.07.2012

## Health is good, records are bad: Chennai mayor

CHENNAI: Nothing is wrong with the healthcare scene in the city, except the way the corporation records causes of deaths. That's Mayor [Saidai Duraiwamy](#) contesting the TOI report on Tuesday that 29 people in the city died of [cholera](#) between January and June this year.

To buttress the argument that some data entry operators had erred, the mayor has pulled up the corporation commissioner. The mayor made the statement that the figures were wrong, when councillors at the council meeting on Wednesday sought an explanation on the large number of cholera deaths.

The report published by TOI was sourced from the corporation's own death registry. In a rejoinder, sent to the newspaper minutes after the council meeting, the corporation said the data operators, who were on contract, had made a wrong entry. "The data entry form has got a drop down box with 40 diseases and some of the cardiac arrest cases were incorrectly selected as cholera," the rejoinder said.

Duraisamy said he was upset that the job of recording deaths

was left to contract labourers instead of doctors. "I have written to the commissioner asking why such a serious job was being carried out by untrained staff," Duraisamy said. Corporation Commissioner [D Karthikeyan](#) refused to comment.

It may be the first time the civic body has acknowledged a faulty system, but it's not the first time the agency is denying or under-reporting deaths due to communicable diseases. The corporation had done it with H1N1 deaths, dengue and rabies in both government and private hospitals. Doctors say they are often asked not to announce the cause of death if it was due to a communicable disease.

In 2010, a leading hospital was pulled up for announcing the death of a child due to dengue. "Every time we speak to the media, it is with an intention to alert public about certain diseases, but we are always threatened to withdraw our statement the next day," said a senior doctor who refused to go on record.

According to the Public Health Act, whenever a patient is diagnosed with a communicable disease, the doctor has to alert the corporation. "This is done so that officials can visit their area of residence or work and ensure that the disease does not spread. In case of death, a certificate is sent to the corporation," said Dr S Elango, former director of public health.

Former mayor M Subramanian and [DMK](#) floor leader T

Subash Chandra Bose said they were surprised with the mayor's story. Subramanian said the health officer should have done weekly reviews to ensure errors don't crop up in the registry. "Death registry is a very important data base for the corporation. It is compiled and sent to the state and centre for policy decisions and schemes. An error there is a shame for the corporation," said Subramanian.

His party colleague Bose said it was an attempt by corporation to underplay communicable diseases. "It would be better if they said there was a cholera outbreak. At least people would get treated," he said.