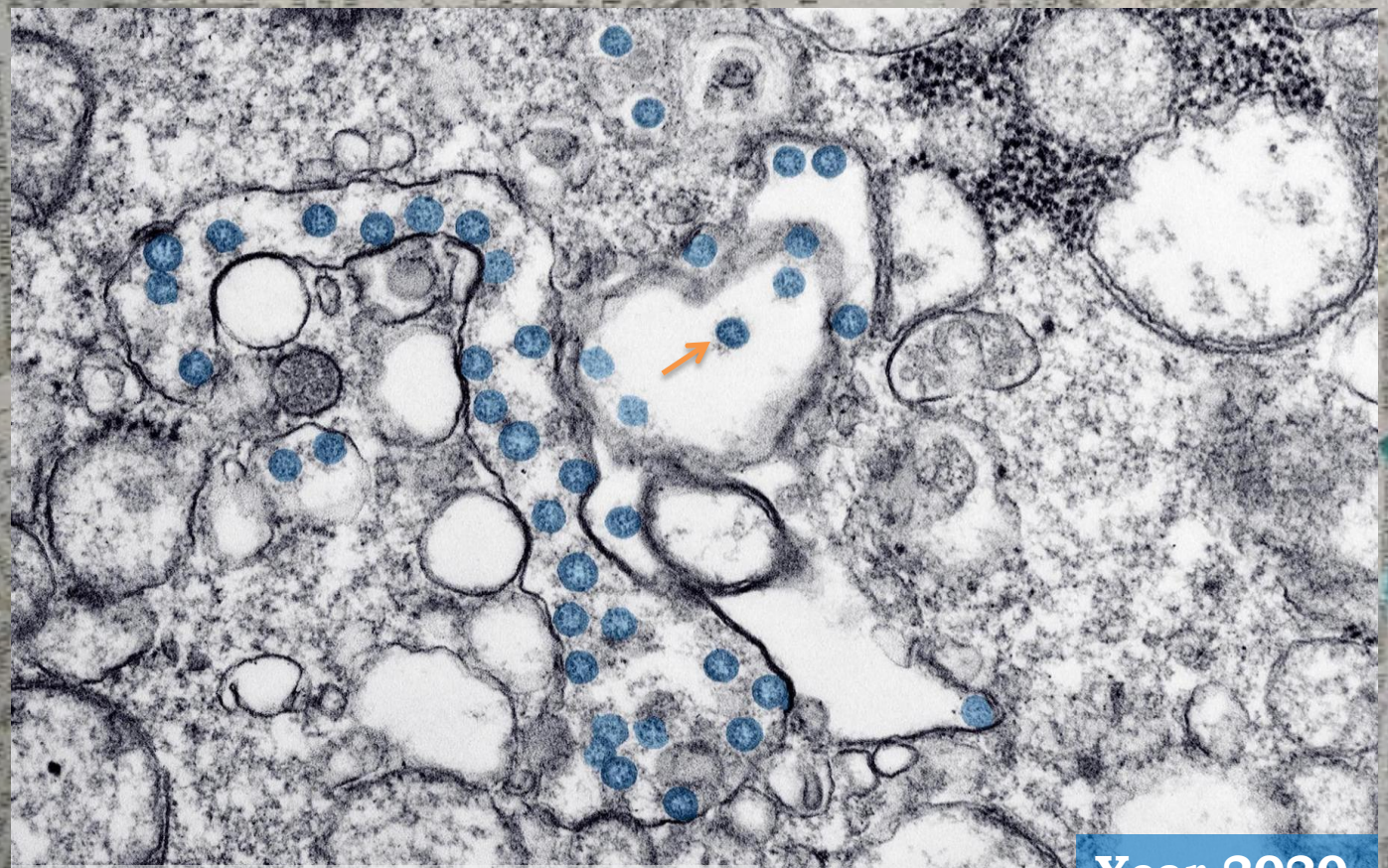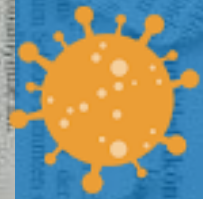# Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology-ENVIS, Pune

(The Project of Ministry of Environment & Climate Change, Govt. of India)

COVID-19

Global & National News Highlights

Photograph by CDC / Hannah A Bullock; Azaibi Tamin.

Year 2020

Editorial

The world is witnessing one of the worst pandemic in the history of the human society. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has emerge as due to a newly discovered coronavirus and spread in almost all countries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) a pandemic after the H1N1 flu in 2009.

The virus is reported to be evolved in China. On 31 December 2019, a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause, in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province in China, was reported to the World Health Organisation. In January 2020, a previously unknown new virus was identified, subsequently named the 2019 novel coronavirus, and samples obtained from cases and analysis of the virus' genetics indicated that this was the cause of the outbreak. This novel coronavirus was named Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) by WHO in February 2020. The virus is referred to as SARS-CoV-2 and the associated disease is COVID-19.

In this pandemic situation, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology & ENVIS (Environmental Information System),Pune has taken initiative to create awareness among people with various activities like webinars, Nationa level online competitions, etc. This document is made with objective of making track record of spread of covid-19. It contains global, national news highlights from various news agencies for the year 2020. The document gives the information about spread, cases number and vaccine progress, awreness infographics related to covid 19.

Let's come together to fight covid, but with social disting and following respiratory atiquestes.

Dr.Gufran Beig

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Content

COVID – 19 - National News

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads. Protect yourself and others from infection by washing your hands or using an alcohol based rub frequently and not touching your face.

The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, so it's important that you also practice respiratory etiquette.

➢ Symptoms
The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- Fever

- Dry cough

- Fatigue

Other symptoms that are less common and may affect some patients include:

- Loss of taste or smell,

- Nasal congestion,

- Conjunctivitis (also known as red eyes)

- Sore throat,

- Headache,

- Muscle or joint pain,

- Different types of skin rash,

- Nausea or vomiting,

- Diarrhea,

- Chills or dizziness.

Symptoms of severe COVID-19 disease include:

- Shortness of breath,

- Loss of appetite,

- Confusion,

- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest,

- High temperature (above 38 °C).

Other less common symptoms are:

- Irritability,

- Confusion,

- Reduced consciousness (sometimes associated with seizures),

- Anxiety,

- Depression,

- Sleep disorders,

- More severe and rare neurological complications such as strokes, brain inflammation, delirium and nerve damage.

People of all ages who experience fever and/or cough associated with difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, or loss of speech or movement should seek medical care immediately. If possible, call your health care provider, hotline or health facility first, so you can be directed to the right clinic.

➢ Precautions
Protect yourself and others from COVID-19

If COVID-19 is spreading in your community, stay safe by taking some simple precautions, such as physical distancing, wearing a mask, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoiding crowds, cleaning your hands, and coughing into a bent elbow or tissue. Check local advice where you live and work. Do it all!

What to do to keep yourself and others safe from COVID-19.

Maintain at least a 1-metre distance between yourself and others to reduce your risk of infection when they cough, sneeze or speak. Maintain an even greater distance between yourself and others when indoors. The further away, the better.

Make wearing a mask a normal part of being around other people. The appropriate use, storage and cleaning or disposal are essential to make masks as effective as possible.

Here are the basics of how to wear a mask:

- Clean your hands before you put your mask on, as well as before and after you take it off, and after you touch it at any time.

- Make sure it covers both your nose, mouth and chin.

- When you take off a mask, store it in a clean plastic bag, and every day either wash it if it's a fabric mask, or dispose of a medical mask in a trash bin.

- Don't use masks with valves.

- For specifics on what type of mask to wear and when, read our Q&A and watch our videos. There is also a Q&A focused on masks and children.

- Find out more about the science of how COVID-19 infects people and our bodies react by watching or reading this interview.

- For specific advice for decision makers, see WHO's technical guidance.

How to make your environment safer

- Avoid the 3Cs: spaces that are closed, crowded or involve close contact.

o Outbreaks have been reported in restaurants, choir practices, fitness classes, nightclubs, offices and places of worship where people have gathered, often in crowded indoor settings where they talk loudly, shout, breathe heavily or sing.

o The risks of getting COVID-19 are higher in crowded and inadequately ventilated spaces where infected people spend long periods of time together in close proximity. These environments are where the virus appears to spreads by respiratory droplets or aerosols more efficiently, so taking precautions is even more important.

- Meet people outside. Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor ones, particularly if indoor spaces are small and without outdoor air coming in.

o For more information on how to hold events like family gatherings, children's football games and family occasions, read our Q&A on small public gatherings.

- Avoid crowded or indoor settings but if you can't, then take precautions:

o Open a window. Increase the amount of 'natural ventilation' when indoors.

o WHO has published Q&As on ventilation and air conditioning for both the general public and people who manage public spaces and buildings.

o Wear a mask (see above for more details).

Don't forget the basics of good hygiene

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. This eliminates germs including viruses that may be on your hands.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and infect you.

- Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately into a closed bin and wash your hands. By following good 'respiratory hygiene', you protect the people around you from viruses, which cause colds, flu and COVID-19.

- Clean and disinfect surfaces frequently especially those which are regularly touched, such as door handles, faucets and phone screens.

What to do if you feel unwell

- Know the full range of symptoms of COVID-19. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough, and tiredness. Other symptoms that are less common and may affect some patients include loss of taste or smell, aches and pains, headache, sore throat, nasal congestion, red eyes, diarrhoea, or a skin rash.

- Stay home and self-isolate even if you have minor symptoms such as cough, headache, mild fever, until you recover. Call your health care provider or hotline for advice. Have someone bring you supplies. If you need to leave your house or have someone near you, wear a medical mask to avoid infecting others.

- If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention immediately. Call by telephone first, if you can and follow the directions of your local health authority.

- Keep up to date on the latest information from trusted sources, such as WHO or your local and national health authorities. Local and national authorities and public health units are best placed to advise on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves.

- ➢ **World Health Organization (WHO) has shared following answers of people questions to informed them with right information and advice to fight against novel coronavirus.**
- ⬥ **What happens to people who get COVID-19?**

Among those who develop symptoms, most (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing hospital treatment. About 15% become seriously ill and require oxygen and 5% become critically ill and need intensive care.

Complications leading to death may include respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), sepsis and septic shock, thromboembolism, and/or multiorgan failure, including injury of the heart, liver or kidneys.

In rare situations, children can develop a severe inflammatory syndrome a few weeks after infection.

↓ Who is most at risk of severe illness from COVID-19?

People aged 60 years and over, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart and lung problems, diabetes, obesity or cancer, are at higher risk of developing serious illness.

However, anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age.

↓ Are there long-term effects of COVID-19?

Some people who have had COVID-19, whether they have needed hospitalization or not, continue to experience symptoms, including fatigue, respiratory and neurological symptoms.

WHO is working with Global Technical Network for Clinical Management of COVID-19, researchers and patient groups around the world to design and carry out studies of patients beyond the initial acute course of illness to understand the proportion of patients who have long term effects, how long they persist, and why they occur. These studies will be used to develop further guidance for patient care.

↓ How can we protect others and ourselves if we don't know who is infected?

Stay safe by taking some simple precautions, such as physical distancing, wearing a mask, especially when distancing cannot be maintained, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoiding crowds and close contact, regularly cleaning your hands, and coughing into a bent elbow or tissue. Check local advice where you live and work. Do it all!

↓ When should I get a test for COVID-19?

Anyone with symptoms should be tested, wherever possible. People who do not have symptoms but have had close contact with someone who is, or may be, infected may also consider testing – contact your local health guidelines and follow their guidance.

While a person is waiting for test results, they should remain isolated from others. Where testing capacity is limited, tests should first be done for those at higher risk of infection, such as health workers, and those at higher risk of severe illness such as older people, especially those living in seniors' residences or long-term care facilities.

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↓ How long does it take to develop symptoms?

The time from exposure to COVID-19 to the moment when symptoms begin is, on average, 5-6 days and can range from 1-14 days.

This is why people who have been exposed to the virus are advised to remain at home and stay away from others, for 14 days, in order to prevent the spread of the virus, especially where testing is not easily available.

↓ Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?

Not yet. Many potential vaccines for COVID-19 are being studied, and several large clinical trials may report results later this year. If a vaccine is proven safe and effective, it must be approved by national regulators, manufactured, and distributed. WHO is working with partners around the world to help coordinate key steps in this process.

WHO is working through the ACT-Accelerator to facilitate equitable access to a safe and effective vaccine for the billions of people who will need it, once it is available.

↓ Are there treatments for COVID-19?

Scientists around the world are working to find and develop treatments for COVID-19.Optimal supportive care includes oxygen for severely ill patients and those who are at risk for severe disease and more advanced respiratory support such as ventilation for patients who are critically ill.

Dexamethasone is a corticosteroid that can help reduce the length of time on a ventilator and save lives of patients with severe and critical illness. Read our dexamethasone Q&A for more information.

Results from the WHO's Solidarity Trial indicated that remdesivir, hydroxychloroquine, lopinavir/ritonavir and interferon regimens appear to have little or no effect on 28-day mortality or the in-hospital course of COVID-19 among hospitalized patients.

Hydroxychloroquine has not been shown to offer any benefit for treatment of COVID-19. Read our hydroxychloroquine Q&A for more information.

WHO does not recommend self-medication with any medicines, including antibiotics, as a prevention or cure for COVID-19.

WHO is coordinating efforts to develop treatments for COVID-19 and will continue to provide new information as it becomes available.

↓ Are antibiotics effective in preventing or treating COVID-19?

Antibiotics do not work against viruses; they only work on bacterial infections. COVID-19 is caused by a virus, so antibiotics do not work. Antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment of COVID-19.

In hospitals, physicians will sometimes use antibiotics to prevent or treat secondary bacterial infections which can be a complication of COVID-19 in severely ill patients. They should only be used as directed by a physician to treat a bacterial infection.

➢ WHO - COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update
Global epidemiological situation

In the past week, global case incidence remained high at approximately 4 million new cases, although a slight downward trend was observed (Figure 1). Weekly deaths, however, continued to rise, with over 69 000 new deaths reported globally. The Region of the Americas was the largest contributor for new weekly cases last week.

Although the European Region reported a continued decrease in new weekly cases, it still accounts for the second greatest proportion of new weekly cases, while deaths rates have continued to increase and accounted for approximately half of the new global deaths in the past week.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region registered a slight decline in both cases and deaths last week, after four months of continued increases. Relatively small increases were reported from the African and South-East Asia Regions, and more substantively from the Western Pacific Region last week.

As of **29 November**, there have been over 61.8 million cases and over 1.4 million deaths reported globally since the start of the pandemic.

Figure 1: COVID-19 cases reported weekly by WHO Region, and global deaths, as of 29 November 2020**
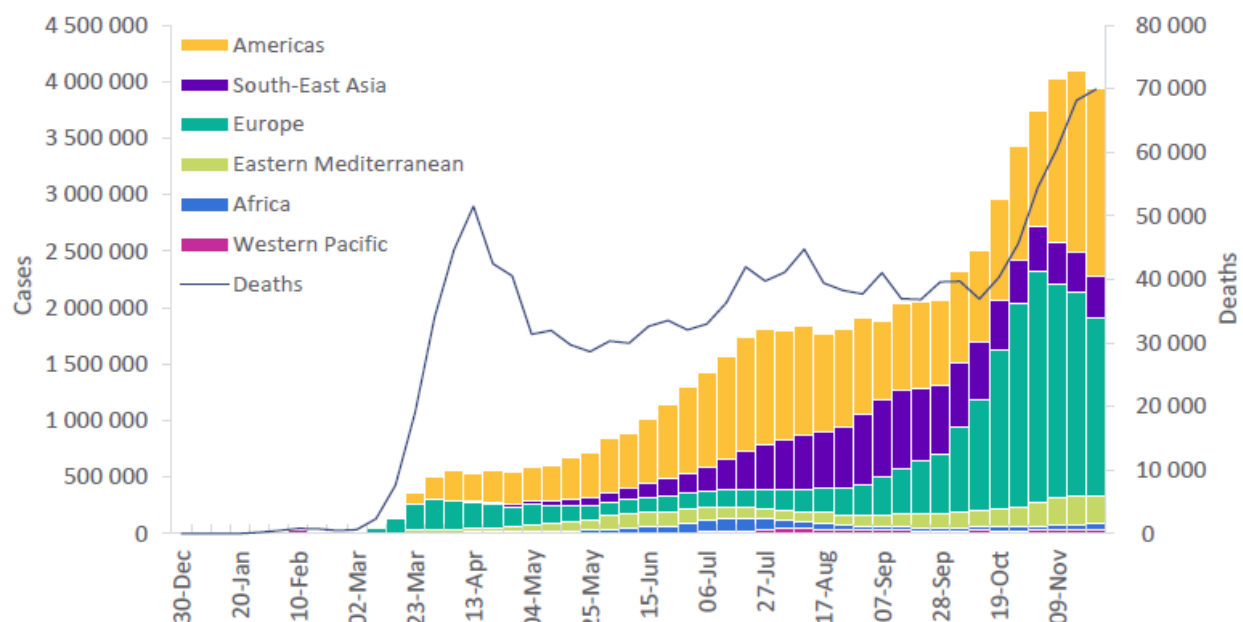
Table 1. Newly reported and cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases and deaths, by WHO Region, as of 29 November 2020**

WHO Region	New cases in last 7 days (%)	Change in new cases in last 7 days *	Cumulative cases (%)	New deaths in last 7 days (%)	Change in new deaths in last 7 days*	Cumulative deaths (%)
Americas	1 652 915 (42%)	3%	26 216 515 (42%)	22 488 (32%)	2%	720 228 (50%)
Europe	1 573 354 (40%)	-13%	18 495 511 (30%)	35 321 (51%)	5%	412 362 (28%)
South-East Asia	371 180 (9%)	6%	10 738 733 (17%)	4 888 (7%)	4%	163 454 (11%)
Eastern Mediterranean	248 909 (6%)	-1%	4 045 906 (7%)	5 800 (8%)	-8%	102 160 (7%)
Africa	48 483 (1%)	3%	1 494 524 (2%)	974 (1%)	-10%	33 512 (2%)
Western Pacific	40 489 (1%)	12%	874 705 (1%)	445 (1%)	1%	17 261 (1%)
Global	3 935 330 (100%)	-4%	61 866 635 (100%)	69 916 (100%)	3%	1 448 990 (100%)

JANUARY 2020

1.1 India's first coronavirus infection confirmed in Kerala

Source: thehindu.com,30 January,2020

India, on Thursday, reported its first positive case of the novel coronavirus (nCoV) from Kerala with a student, who was studying in Wuhan University and had travelled to India, testing positive for the virus.

A Union Health Ministry statement said the "student is in isolation at the hospital. The student is stable and is being closely monitored."

Following the first case, the government has announced that all persons who have come from China after January 15, will be tested for the virus as it has an incubation period of 14 days. It has also prescribed a 14-day home isolation regimen and advised that trips to China should be avoided.

Alarm bells: People outside a hospital in Thrissur where an nCoV patient has been kept in isolation on January 30, 2020.

"India till date has screened 234 flights and 43,346 passengers. Worldwide we have a total of 7,711 confirmed cases and 170 deaths," a senior Health Ministry official said.

Director of the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Virology, Pune, Dr. Priya Abraham, said: "Forty-nine samples have been tested till now and one sample has tested positive. Now a next test known as "next gen sequencing test" will be done on the sample and the final result will be declared by Friday evening ."

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Thursday reconvened the emergency committee on the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) under the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005). The committee will re-consider declaring nCoV outbreak a global public health emergency and also advise on recommendations to manage the outbreak.

Thrissur on alert

Thrissur in Kerala has been put on high alert after one of the four persons admitted to the isolation ward of the district general hospital with symptoms of novel coronavirus infection (nCoV), tested positive. The other three persons tested negative for the virus. The condition of the patient is stable, according to Health Department sources.

A 24-hour control room has been set up at the District Medical Office and the district Collectorate.

The student had reached Kolkata from Wuhan, China, on the night of January 23. She travelled to Kochi the next day from where she went to her hometown in Thrissur.

Getting to know about the alert the next day from the news media, she reached the nearest primary health centre at Mathilakam to inform the Health officials about her travel. As she had not shown any symptoms of flu, she was advised to remain home for 28 days and maintain personal hygiene besides wearing mask. She was also given a contact number in case she developed any fever or cough or other symptoms of flu. On January 27, she contacted the District Surveillance Officer when she developed flu symptoms. The district team reached her house and moved her to the isolation ward at the Thrissur General Hospital.

The same day, her body fluid sample was sent to the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune. On Thursday morning, the NIV informed that the case was positive.

People, who were in contact with the student have been put under house quarantine. The Health Department is also tracking and identifying persons who may have come into contact with her.

Isolation rooms

Special isolation rooms have been set up in government Medical College Hospital (MCH), Thrissur, to treat cases of nCoV infections. In all, 20 pay-ward rooms have been vacated to make the special arrangements. The isolation ward has been set up according to Standard Operative Procedure.

"The MCH is ready to take up the challenge. "A special medical team has been readied. Safety measures and medicines are in place. Steps have been taken to take care of safety of doctors and other workers," according to RMO C.P. Murali.

The infected patient may be shifted to the MCH, Thrissur, on Thursday night after a Rapid Reaction medical team will reach there with the Health Minister, to examine her.

The Health Department has asked people, who returned from China, to report without any delay. The officials have asked people visiting general hospital and the area around it to wear masks.

Jugal Kishore, director professor and head of department-community medicine, Vardhman Mahavir Medical College (VMMC) said: "There is no vaccine or drug available against the virus. Only symptomatic treatment is available. We still don't know how the virus will behave in the new population. Prevention and strict surveillance is very important in India."

Evacuation from Hubei

Meanwhile, stating that India is still awaiting necessary approval from China to evacuate Indians in Hubei province of China, External Affairs Ministry's spokesperson Raveesh Kumar, on Thursday said: "We have established contact with over 600 Indians across the province and are individually ascertaining their willingness to be repatriated.

We are working round-the-clock on the ground to work out the necessary logistics. Arrangements are being put in place for people to travel to the airport."

 "We have made a formal request to the government of China for bringing back Indian nationals from the Hubei province in two flights.

We are conducting regular review on the situation arising out of the outbreak of Coronavirus in China," Mr. Kumar added.
"People need not panic. But we need to take preventive measures. Wash hands with soap and water frequently. Cover mouth and nose with medical mask or tissue when sneezing or coughing.

Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever or cough. Seek medical help in case of fever, cough or difficulty in breathing," officials said.

The Health Ministry also advised that those with a travel history to China after their return should — for a period of 14 days — sleep in a separate room, limit contact with other family members and avoid visitors and close contact with anyone with cold or flu like symptoms (maintain a distance of at least 1 meter from any individual).

"Thermal screening sensors are operational and few more such equipment are being procured. The immigration and other staff members at the airports have been sensitized and dedicated ambulances are placed at ports.

We also held mock drill for checking preparedness and management of possible cases. Deployment of medical and para-medical staff is also being done for round-the-clock service," the official said.

He added that hospitals have prepared isolation wards while personal protection equipments and masks are available in adequate quantity in all the States/UTs.

2.1 Kerala now confirms third case of novel coronavirus

Source: economictimes.indiatimes.com,6 February,2020

OPD staff wears a safety mask as a precaution after the outbreak of coronavirus, at a hospital in Thrissur.

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The third novel coronavirus case has been reported in India, with another Keralite student who returned from Wuhan university on Monday testing positive for the infection.

The medical student is in an isolation ward at Kanhangad district hospital in Kasaragod, state Health Minister K K Shailaja informed the Kerala assembly.

The condition of the student is "stable", she said.

Out of the 104 samples tested till Sunday, three have tested positive.

This is the third positive case reported from Kerala.

Two earlier positive cases, also of students who came back from Wuhan, the epicentre of the epidemic, were reported from Thrissur & Alapuzha districts.

The minister made the statement in the assembly under Rule 300 in the wake of three positive cases reported from the state.

A total of 1,999 people, who have a travel history from China & other affected countries, are under observation in Kerala,of whom 75 are in isolation wards of various hospitals.

The remaining 1,924 are under home quarantine as per a medical bulletin issued on Sunday night.

The minister has made it clear that those under observation at home should keep away from public functions and should not participate in any events or go out of their homes during the 28 day incubation period.

2.2 Coronavirus update 11 Feb: Death toll exceeds 1000, patients in Kerala declared virus-free and more

Source: firstpost.com,11 February,2020

Two out of the three cases in Kerala (which are the only confirmed cases in the country) have tested negative and been declared disease-free.

The Wuhan coronavirus crossed another scary landmark on February 11: it has now claimed 1,018 lives. The number of infections also continued to rise to 43,109. The vast majority of these cases have been identified in the Hubei province, in which the city of Wuhan lies. The greatest threat outside of mainland China lies in a cruise ship that has been docked in Japan for over a week. The Diamond Princess is carrying over 3,500 people and has 135 confirmed cases of the infection. Those with suspected and confirmed symptoms are being evacuated from the ship and taken to treatment facilities on land.

The situation in India

In a welcome development, two out of the three cases in Kerala (which are the only confirmed cases in the country) have tested negative and been declared disease-free. The third case is also reportedly doing well and on the path to recovery.

On February 10, Prime Minister Modi offered assistance and condolences in a letter to China's premier, Xi Jinping. Mr Jinping replied thanking the PM and hoped for further cooperation and solidarity in the future.

In a study by researchers at Humboldt University and Robert Koch Institute in Germany, India ranks 17th among foreign countries in terms of importing the coronavirus infection. The study is based on air travel and the density of passengers passing through airports. In other words, the more connected and crowded an airport is, the higher the likelihood of the infection spreading. India had a national import risk of 0.2%, whereas Thailand, which is considered most at risk was at 2.1%.

As of now, 319 cases in 24 countries have been reported. There have only been two deaths outside China - one in Hong Kong and the other in the Philippines.

More information and uncertainty surrounding the mystery virus

Scientists still don't know for sure where the virus came from. While it is established that a meat market in Wuhan was the source, the animal vector (or carrier) of the infection is yet to be recognized. Evidence suggests that the virus initially lay in bats but was transmitted to an intermediary species before infecting humans. The latest candidate for this middle species is a pangolin. These are ant-eating mammals that are heavily imported into China for food and medicine. Studies have not been able to confirm this yet and the search continues.

Meanwhile, Chinese officials had conflicting views on whether the virus can be transmitted through the air. Zeng Qun, the deputy head of Shanghai's Civil Affairs Bureau, said in a press conference that the virus can be spread in this way. This raised alarm bells since the virus can spread to people even if they're not close to each other. The Chinese government and WHO, however, stated that the virus is spread by people in close physical contact and reiterated the need to constantly wash hands and stay away from people exhibiting symptoms.

Some tips to keep yourself safe

- Wash your hands frequently as this eliminates the virus — and other microorganisms — if they are present on your hands.

- Use tissues, or cover your face with the inside of your elbow (radial portion) when you sneeze or cough. Dispose of the tissue right away. As for the elbow, it is better than sneezing on your hands as they are likely to touch other surfaces and transmit the infection if present.

- Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth without first cleaning your hands properly as this may cause the virus to enter the body.

- Maintain a distance of at least 1 meter from someone who is coughing or exhibiting flu-like symptoms.

- If you have been coughing and having difficulty breathing, visit your doctor.

2.3 Kerala Defeats Coronavirus; India's Three COVID-19 Patients Successfully Recover

Source: weather.com,15 February,2020

Three patients from Kerala, who were India's only positive COVID-19 cases till now, have successfully recovered from the infection as on Friday, February 14.

The news of their recovery was confirmed by Kerala's Finance Minister, Thomas Isaac, who in a Twitter post said: "Just as in the case of Nipah, Kerala has won the battle with coronavirus. All the three patients identified have been confirmed by central authorities to have fully recovered." All three patients are medical students who returned from Wuhan, China—the epicenter of the disease outbreak.

On Thursday, Kerala health officials had declared that the first two positive cases, reported from the state's Thrissur and Alappuzha districts, had already recovered after testing negative for the COVID-19 infection. The third student from Kasargod has also recovered, but remains under observation for some time. Kerala health officials have so far relieved about 1,062 people who were previously suspected to be infected by coronavirus. About 2,397 patients continue to be in quarantine observation; out of them, 2,375 are under home quarantine, and 22 under isolation in hospitals.

On February 3, Kerala had declared the coronavirus outbreak as a state disaster after the number of positive cases rose to three. However, the declaration was withdrawn last week, as no more confirmed cases of the virus were reported thereafter.

Meanwhile, the fast-spreading virus has infected about 64,000 people around the world as of February 14, killing close to 1,380 people in China.

2.4 Three suspected Covid-19 patients admitted to Pune's Naidu Hospital

Source: hindustantimes.com,16 February,2020

As of Saturday, a total of 23 admissions has been recorded at Naidu for suspected coronavirus infection

The couple returned from Shanghai on February 2 and were admitted after they started showing symptoms of coronavirus, including cough and fever A married couple and a man were admitted to Naidu hospital on Saturday under suspicion of coronavirus (Covid-19).According to information provided by the health department, the married couple include a 28-year-old male and a 27-year-old female who returned from Shanghai, while the third patient is a 26-year-old man from Thailand.

The couple returned from Shanghai on February 2 and were admitted after they started showing symptoms of coronavirus, including cough and fever. Since the incubation period of the virus is 28 days, anyone showing symptoms within 28 days is being isolated. The third patient returned from Thailand on February 9 and showed similar symptoms, including sore throat, cough and cold. As of Saturday, a total of 23 admissions has been recorded at Naidu for suspected coronavirus infection and 23 samples have been tested out of which 20 have tested negative. All the three latest admissions are stable and their results are awaited.

2.5 COVID-19 Death Toll Jumps to 1,873; Indian Economy Starts to Feel the Heat

Source: weather.com,18 February,2020

Medical staff members work in a laboratory in Wuhan, central China's Hubei Province, Feb. 13, 2020.

The question on everyone's mind right now is, 'has the new coronavirus disease COVID-19 peaked?' The data suggests a definite slowdown in the rate of increase in the total death count and the number of people infected. Yet, the continued growing number of confirmed cases across the globe continues to be the cause of concern.

Chinese health authority on Tuesday said it received reports of 1,886 new confirmed cases of novel coronavirus infection and 98 deaths from the previous day. Among the deaths, 93 were in Hubei Province, according to the National Health Commission. Monday's death toll of 98 is lower than that of Sunday (105) and Saturday (142). More than 10,000 infected patients have recovered successfully in China so far. With this, the total number of deaths has spiked to 1,868 in mainland China. Five deaths have been reported outside China so far. The number of confirmed cases has also gone up to 73,429, out of which 72,436 are from China. Japan has reported the 619 infected cases, maximum outside mainland China, followed by Singapore (77) and Hong Kong (58).

COVID-19 starts to impact Indian businesses

A technician works in a workshop of Chongqing TS-Precision Technology Co. Ltd. in Chongqing Airport Development Area in southwest China's Chongqing Municipality, Feb. 12, 2020. Companies in Chongqing have rolled out active precaution measures while resuming production amid the national fight against the novel coronavirus outbreak.

As the spread of coronavirus and resultant fatalities continue to make headlines, Indian companies have begun to feel the heat with disruption in the supply-demand scenario, according to LocalCircles, community-based social media platform, on Monday.

According to the survey report from LocalCircles, 19 per cent of Indian entities said they were facing supply disruption. At the same time, 26 per cent of Indian entities said to be noticing weak demand following the COVID-19 outbreak in China. Top Indian imports from China include electronic equipment, machinery, organic chemicals, fertilisers, vehicle components, telecom equipment and mobile phones.

The COVID-19 outbreak has also restricted trade movement to and from China, which might impact India manufacturing units that are dependent on these Chinese imports, the report said. "The pharmaceutical industry, for instance, has 8-10 weeks' inventories. But it believes if the China supply shutdowns extended to April, there will be a shortage of generic drugs in India," it said.

China is India's biggest trade partner after the US and supplies some critical input items to our industries. Data suggest that imports from China comprise more than 15% of India's overall imports in terms of value.

Industry asks the government for import subsidies

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has recommended a slew of measures to the government, including subsidies to overcome the adverse impact of supply disruption of Chinese imports due to the novel coronavirus epidemic. Since China has placed four of its

provinces and 50 cities under lockdown to contain the COVID-19 outbreak, supply chains of Chinese imports to India have been severely disrupted.

In its report on the impact of 'novel coronavirus in China', the CII has asked the government to minimise risks to key sectors arising from supply chain disruptions by encouraging domestic manufacturing. The CII asked the BJP government to remove higher customs duties imposed on certain products that may need to be sourced from other countries now. The report also recommended import subsidies for certain products under a trade deal.

Moreover, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) wrote to Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday urging him to convene a meeting with trade and industry representative to talk on the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on them and carve out measures to support the affected businesses. In its letter, the traders' body suggested that along with long term measures, the government should come out with a special package for traders and small industries to scale up their production capacity and stocks as the supply from China have been severely hit.

2.6 Covid-19 scare: Coronavirus outbreak may not have reached its peak yet

Source: indiatoday.in,19 February,2020

Indians who were flown from Wuhan in China in the wake of coronavirus outbreak preparing to leave Delhi quarantine camp.

The average incubation period for Covid-19 is over five days. Confirmation of coronavirus infection may require a lapse of over six days. This means the reported decline in new cases of coronavirus infection, and halt in geographical spread of Covid-19 may be a temporary dip in the curve.

Jury is still out on how big is the coronavirus Covid-19 outbreak, both in its spread and fatality. Public health experts are trying to ascertain whether coronavirus outbreak has reached its peak, and if not when it will reach its peak. The Covid-19 infection would begin declining only after that phase.

In most estimates, coronavirus outbreak has not yet reached its peak despite China showing first sign of decline in report of new cases and daily fatality. Epidemiologists suggest that it may be weeks or even months before coronavirus outbreak reaches its peak.

The most talked about estimate of coronavirus outbreak peak has been the one presented by Chinese doctor Zhong Nanshan, who earned his credibility for discovery of SARS virus outbreak. He presented his estimate of Covid-19 outbreak estimate on February 11 saying coronavirus infection is likely to peak by the end of February.

It is estimated that of 1.11 crore population of Wuhan, the epicentre of coronavirus outbreak, over 10 lakh would have been infected by Covid-19 by the time the viral infection starts declining.

Some other health experts have, however, raised doubts over Zhong Nanshan's estimate of February-end becoming the peak phase of coronavirus outbreak. They have referred to "underreporting" of Covid-19 cases in China and suggested that Zhong Nanshan's estimate might be an attempt to calm the nerves of panic-stricken public.

Researchers in Japan and Hong Kong have estimated that peak of coronavirus outbreak may come sometime between March-end and May. Experts have pointed to extreme lockdown situation in China and lack of adequate facility in villages of China.

Incidentally, a couple of days after Zhong Nanshan paper estimating peak phase to be February-end, a sharp spike in the cases of corornavirus infection and fatality was seen in China. On February 13, more than 14,000 new cases were reported in China. This was the biggest spike for a day.

Many Chinese cities, including Wuhan, have been in complete lockdown with restrictions on travel and transport. But in some areas, the extended Chinese New Year holiday has ended and people started returning to work last week. This opens up the possibilities of new chains of transmission, health experts have warned.

But the good news coming from China is that the country reported less than 100 deaths due to coronavirus infection for the first time since January. The daily number of newly confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) also fell below 2,000 for the first time on Monday. But the same day, China lost a senior doctor involved in combating Covid-19 outbreak.

After Egypt reported its first case of coronavirus infection on Monday making Africa another continent infected by Covid-19. Now only South America is untouched by coronavirus outbreak. However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its daily coronavirus outbreak bulletin for Tuesday said no new country reported cases of Covid-19 infection.

Moreover, China has a greater fatality rate than the rest of the world. In the estimate of Zhong Nanshan, fatality rate for coronavirus infection in China is 1.6 for every 100 Covid-19 infection. This figure for rest of the world is 1 for every 500 infections.

The average incubation period for Covid-19 is over five days. Confirmation of coronavirus infection may require a lapse of over six days. This means the reported decline in new cases of coronavirus infection, and halt in geographical spread of Covid-19 may be a temporary dip in the curve representing spread of the disease which, in the estimate of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, is enormously risky and still presents a dangerous situation. With millions resuming work in factories and offices in China, new cases may spike soon.

2.7 Coronavirus advisory: Government asks citizens to avoid non-essential travel to Singapore

Source: newindianexpress.com,22 February,2020

NEW DELHI: In furtherance to the travel advisory issued earlier in the wake of the deadly coronavirus outbreak, the government on Saturday advised citizens to avoid all non-essential travel to Singapore.

It also said screening at airports is now being planned for flight passengers coming to India from Kathmandu, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia from Monday.

Currently, passengers from China, Hong Kong, Thailand, South Korea, Singapore, and Japan are screened at 21 designated airports in the country for possible exposure to the novel coronavirus.

The decision was taken during a review meeting chaired by the Cabinet Secretary to take stock of the status, actions taken and preparedness of states and UTs regarding the management of novel coronavirus (COVID19) here on Saturday, the Union Health Ministry said.

"In furtherance to the travel advisory issued earlier, citizens are advised to avoid all non-essential travel to Singapore," the ministry said in a statement.

As on date, 21,805 passengers have been brought under community surveillance.

In addition, 3,97,152 flight passengers and 9,695 travelers at seaports have been screened, it said.

After a detailed review, in addition to the screening as per earlier advisories, universal screening at airports is now being planned for flights from Kathmandu, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia from Monday, the ministry said.

Secretaries of ministries of Health, Civil Aviation, Defence, Information and Broadcasting, DG AFMS and representatives from External Affairs Ministry, Home Affairs Ministry, Bureau of Immigration, ITBP and Army were also present at the meeting, the statement said.

2.8 India to send aircraft on February 26 to Wuhan to bring back its citizens after China gives clearance

Source:.newindianexpress.com,24 February,2020

Earlier, official sources had said that the neighbouring country was delaying clearance to the C-17 military transport aircraft which was to fly on February 20 to Wuhan.

NEW DELHI: India is likely to send a military transport aircraft to the coronavirus-hit Wuhan on February 26 to deliver relief material and bring back more Indians following a clearance from China, Union Health Ministry officials said on Monday.

"As informed by the Ministry of External Affairs, departure of the Air Force flight to Wuhan is being planned for February 26 and the evacuees will arrive on February 27," the ministry said in a statement.

Earlier, official sources had said that the neighbouring country was delaying clearance to the C-17 military transport aircraft which was to fly on February 20 to Wuhan, though Beijing had allowed fights from other countries to evacuate their nationals.

According to a health ministry official, China has now given clearance to the Indian military transport aircraft.

Official sources said Japan, Ukraine and France have been allowed to operate flights between February 16 and 20 but India's request had not been approved.

When contacted, a Chinese Embassy spokesperson had said there was no deliberate delay in grant of permission for the Indian flight to reach Wuhan.

The aircraft will carry a large consignment of medical supplies to China and bring back more Indians from Wuhan.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, who undertook a review of the ongoing novel coronavirus (COVID19) management across the country with the senior officials of the Ministry, informed that at present the screening of passengers is being done in all 21 airports, 12 major and 65 non-major seaports and border crossings.

In all 4,48,449 passengers from 4,214 flights have been screened so far.

Also, as of now, 2,707 samples have been tested of which only three samples earlier had tested positive (Kerala) and all the three patients have been discharged from the hospitals.

They are now in home isolation.

In furtherance to the travel advisory issued earlier in the wake of the deadly coronavirus outbreak, the government on Saturday advised citizens to avoid all non-essential travel to Singapore.

Also, flight passengers coming to India from China, Hong Kong, Thailand, South Korea, Singapore, Japan, Kathmandu, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia are being screened at 21 designated airports in the country for possible exposure to the novel coronavirus.

All Indian evacuees from Wuhan had tested negative for COVID19 and have gone back to their homes from the quarantine facilities.

Also, 23,259 persons were brought under community surveillance in 34 states and UTs through the Integrated Diseases Surveillance Programme (IDSP) network.

Regarding movement across Kartarpur border in Punjab, Vardhan was informed that in discussion with the Home Ministry, Health Ministry and Health Secretary, Punjab, special screening has been strengthened across the border and further necessary facilitation for masks to be worn by pilgrims is being initiated.

2.9 Coronavirus Spread Puts Densely Populated India on High Alert

Source: bloombergquint.com,28 February,2020

As the novel coronavirus spreads from China around the globe, India appears especially at risk because of its dense population, patchy health-care system and high rate of migration. The nation has confirmed just three cases, while the Indian government says 23,531 people are under observation. Neighboring Sri Lanka has reported one infection, while Pakistan disclosed its first patients this week: Two travelers who had separately returned from Iran, one of whom had been on a tour with 28 people. While India's numbers look tiny set against a population of 1.3 billion, the World Health Organization has warned that new cases are appearing faster outside China than those within the country where the virus originated. The discovery in the U.S. of a case with no ties to a known outbreak has raised concern that a similar emergence in a country as densely populated as India could quickly overwhelm the chronically underfunded health-care system.

"It's already here, they've detected a few cases, and if it starts spreading you will see a very fast" evolution, said Kasisomayajula Viswanath, a professor at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "Right now they are able to control it, and monitor it, and treat it effectively. But if it is spreading along with other contagious diseases that are already here, then it becomes a matter of co onsiderable concern."

Apart from its sheer size, India is cause for particular worry because of the density of its population: 420 people live on each square kilometer (about 0.4 of a square mile), compared with 148 per square kilometer in China. Places like Mumbai's Dharavi slum, or even a typical Indian household containing extended families, can facilitate contact with virus-bearing droplets emitted by breathing, ta alking, coughing or sneezing.

Pakistan and Bangladesh look even more exposed than their larger South Asian neighbor. The two spend less on health care than India, and each has an array of entry points from countries where outbreaks are increasing. Pakistan's first case appears to have come from neighboring Iran, which has emerged as the center of the outbreak in the Middle East, with at least 245 confirmed cases and 26 deaths Pakistan has suspended all flights to China, Japan, and now Iran. Like Bangladesh, Pakistan has declined to evacuate students stranded in China. Bangladesh did extract 312 citizens from Wuhan, the origin of the virus, keeping them in quarantine in camps outside Dhaka for 14 days.

Rural Workers

Like China, India has a high rate of internal migration. In the 2011 census, 450 million people moved from one area to another in search of opportunity. Many commute daily from their villages to work in the cities. That could make it harder to contain an outbreak to one locality, as China has attempted to do by locking down the entire state of Hubei. "That's not really possible in India," said Vivekanand Jha, the executive director of the George Institute for Global Health, India, in New Delhi. "Indians, if they are infected, are much more

likely to remain in circulation and potentially come in contact with uninfected individuals wherever in the world they might be." A large-scale outbreak stands to put a heavy strain on India's economy, which is much smaller than China's and where growth this year is on track to be the weakest in more than a decade. The country's health-care spending is among the lowest in the world -- just 3.7% of gross domestic product. That's left India with a patchwork of overcrowded public hospitals, and private ones that are unaffordable for many people.

Travelers Screened

Indian Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said he's "extremely proud" of his country's response so far to containing the virus, which includes input from the armed forces, national carrier Air India and embassies abroad. Authorities have been screening travelers at airports, seaports and border crossings. It says the three confirmed cases, all discovered in the southern state of Kerala, have all been discharged from hospital.

Still, Padmanesan Narasimhan, a professor of public health at the University of New South Wales who has worked on tuberculosis control in India, said the chances of the disease spreading in India are high. "Because of internal migration, and the population density, and the limited access to health infrastructure, that would be a major challenge in India," he said.

Disease Expertise One area where India and its South Asian neighbors may have an advantage over the places where the coronavirus is already spreading is the weather. Coronaviruses of all kinds tend to travel better in cooler, drier climates -- it's why flu season is in winter -- and with the subcontinent's summer approaching, the stifling heat may end up snuffing out the virus, too. Moreover, whi le health-care systems across the region are underfunded, they do have expertise in fighting infectious diseases, given the prevalence of malaria, dengue and tuberculosis. Wealthier economies, from Hong Kong to Italy to Japan, have struggled to quell the spread of the virus. "If it comes here, certainly it is a matter for concern because of the density of the population, and the sheer scale of it, " said Harvard's Viswanath. "On the other hand, it looks like we've not been able to do a good job globally. I don't have tremendous confidence in other systems, either."

MARCH 2020

3.1 Coronavirus in India: 6 confirmed cases as Covid-19 outbreak knocks on Indian doors | All that has happened

Source: indiatoday.in, 3 March, 2020

A total of six confirmed cases of Covid-19, or coronavirus, have now been reported in India. Three of these have been reported this week in quick succession. Here is a recap of everything that's happened in India vis-a-vis the coronavirus outbreak.

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) epidemic is knocking on Indian doors after infecting tens of thousands of people in over 60 countries across the world. This week, India reported three fresh coronavirus cases, taking the total number of confirmed infections in the country to six.

And since then, focus has increasingly shifted to the fallout impact of the new Covid-19 cases and to the question of how ready the country is to fight the global outbreak.

Covid-19 first originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The disease, that leads to illnesses ranging from common cold, fever, shortness of breath to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death, is caused by a kind of coronavirus never seen before.

This led to the virus initially being called novel coronavirus 2019 (nCov-19). The disease was later formally labelled Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19). In the media, it's being widely called coronavirus.

As of Tuesday, coronavirus has infected more than 89,000 people in over 60 countries. The virus has killed more than 3,000 people in around 8 countries.

Most of these cases (80,151 infected and 2,943 dead) are from mainland China, the epicentre of the Covid-19 outbreak, according to figures compiled by news agency Reuters.

India has largely escaped the brunt of the outbreak so far. But the three fresh cases reported this week have brought the spotlight on how prepared the country is to deal with the coronavirus outbreak and how the situation stands currently.

Here, we recap everything that's happened in India vis-à-vis the coronavirus outbreak. Remember, this information is as of March 3.

Medics outside an isolation ward meant for coronavirus patients at a Hyderabad hospital. India reported three fresh cases of coronavirus, or Covid-19, this week

CORONAVIRUS IN INDIA: CURRENT AND PAST CASES

So far, India has reported six positive cases of coronavirus, or Covid-19. Of these, three were from Kerala and one each from Delhi, Hyderabad and Jaipur. The Kerala cases were reported in February, while the Delhi, Hyderabad and Jaipur infections were confirmed this week.

KERALA: Kerala was the first state in the country to report positive cases of coronavirus. Three residents, all of whom had returned from the coronavirus epicentre Wuhan, tested positive for the disease and were put under isolation. They received treatment in Kerala hospitals and were discharged one after the other after their follow-up tests turned negative. By February 20, all three -- all students from Wuhan -- were discharged from hospitals.

DELHI: On Monday, two fresh cases of coronavirus were reported in India. Of these, one was of a 45-year-old Delhi man who had returned from Europe on February 25. His travel history revealed that he had travelled from Italy to Budapest in Hungary and finally to Vienna in Austria from where he flew to India on an Air India flight. He is currently under quarantine at a Delhi hospital.

Novel Coronavirus (COVID19)

Protect yourself and others!

Help us to help you

Follow these Do's and Don'ts

Do's
- Observe good personal hygiene
- Practice frequent hand washing with soap
- Follow basic respiratory etiquette - cover your mouth while sneezing and coughing
- Wash your hands with soap and running water (when hands are visibly dirty)
- Clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water (when your hands are not visibly dirty)
- Throw used tissues into closed bins immediately after use
- See a doctor if you feel unwell

Don'ts
- Have a close contact with anyone, if you're experiencing cough and fever
- Spit in public
- Contact with live animals or consumption of raw/ undercooked meat
- Travel to farms, live animal markets or where animals are slaughtered

For further information :
Call at Ministry of Health, Govt. of India's 24*7 control room number
+91-11-2397 8046
Email at ncov2019@gmail.com

mohfw.gov.in   @MoHFWindia   @MoHFW_INDIA   mohfwindia

HYDERABAD: The second fresh case reported in India was of a 24-year-old software engineer who had returned from Dubai. The techie had flown from Dubai to Bengaluru, where he works, before travelling to Hyderabad on a bus. In Hyderabad, the techie reported symptoms of Covid-19 and was admitted to a government hospital where he was found to be infected with coronavirus. He is presently under quarantine there.

JAIPUR: A 69-year-old Italian tourist admitted to a hospital in Jaipur tested positive for coronavirus on Tuesday. Two earlier tests of the Italian man had shown discrepancies with one coming up negative while the other positive. A re-verification test conducted at the Pune-based National Institute of Virology confirmed that the man was indeed infected with coronavirus.

FALLOUT OF NEW CASES

The initial three coronavirus cases in Kerala were comparatively localised compared to what has happened this week. The three new cases have had secondary consequences as authorities rushed to contain any possible spread of the new virus.

Noida schools shut

The Delhi man who tested positive for coronavirus has had authorities in neighbouring Noida on the edge. Before testing positive, the man threw a birthday party for his son at a prominent Delhi five-star. This triggered fears that the son's schoolmates who attended the party could be at risk.

As a precautionary measure, the private school where the kids study shut down for the remainder of this week. In an email to parents, the schools said the move was purely precautionary and that no student or parents other than the one infected had been found coronavirus positive.

The private institution also said it was taking preventive steps such as fumigation of the campus and school buses. Separately, another Noida-based school said it would remain shut for the next few days so that it could sanitise its campus as a precautionary step

Air India warns fliers

On Tuesday, Air India, which flew the Delhi coronavirus patient from Vienna to India, sent out an advisory to the passengers of that flight. The national carrier said that passengers who had flown on the February 25 Air India Flight 154 from Vienna to Delhi must come forward and follow the protocol notified by the Union Ministry of Health.

Air India has essentially asked passengers of the flight to come forward and get themselves screened for symptoms of coronavirus. Meanwhile, the Air India crew that had flown the flight in question is already under quarantine. The ten crew members have been asked to keep themselves under isolation at home and report to doctors if they notice any symptoms of Covid-19.

Separately, low-cost carrier IndiGo, which flew the Bengaluru techie on a Dubai-Bengaluru flight, has placed four crew members from the flight under home observation.

Telangana, Karnataka begin hunt

Down south, authorities in Telangana and Karnataka are rushing to identify all those who interacted with the 24-year-old Bengaluru techie who tested positive for coronavirus this week. By Monday evening, authorities had identified around 80 people the techie had come in contact with. These included doctors at the hospital he was admitted to, his roommates as well as co-passengers on the bus he took from Bengaluru to Hyderabad.

On Tuesday, Telangana's health minister said that all those whom the Bengaluru techie, who's admitted to a Hyderabad hospital, had come in contact with are beign screened. The minister also said that they are collecting information on those who had travelled with the young man from Dubai to Bengaluru.

The minister said that more than half the people the techie had contact with have been identified and that both the Telangana and Karnataka governments are taking care of the people at risk.

Agra on alert

Agra in Uttar Pradesh is also on alert after links emerged with both the Delhi coronavirus patient and the Italian tourist who tested positive for Covid-19 in Jaipur.

On Tuesday, the Ministry of Health said in a statement that six people from Agra with "high viral load" have been placed under isolation and their blood samples have been sent to the Pune-based National Institute of Virology for testing.

The statement added that the six people had come in contact with the Delhi coronavirus patient. News agency PTI, quoting sources, reported that the 45-year-old man had come to Agra to visit his family and that this is how he came in contact with the six people.

Separately, it's been discovered that the coronavirus-infected Italian tourist in Jaipur was travelling with a group of people that visited Agra this weekend. It's unclear whether the Italian man himself visited the city, but news agency PTI reported that the city's hotels and tourist sites have been asked to inform authorities as visitors from Italy, Iran or China arrive.

GOVT GEARS UP FOR CORONAVIRUS BATTLE

With fresh cases being reported in India, the government has gone on war-footing to combat the global threat. Among the new measures taken include:

Stepped-up screening: Thermal screening of passengers at airports and other ports of entry has been increased. According to a Ministry of Health statement, all passengers arriving directly or indirectly from China, South Korea, Japan, Iran, Italy, Hong Kong, Macau, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, Singapore and Taiwan must undergo medical screening while entering India.

Laboratories ready: Indian laboratories have been on a standby for coronavirus testing for a while now. According to a February 6 statement by the India Council of Medical Research, at least 12 laboratories and centres across the country are equipped to test for coronavirus. The Pune-based National Institute of Virology remains the foremost laboratory for all verification and reconfirmation tests.

Travel restrictions: On Tuesday, the government issued a revised list of travel advisories warning Indian citizens against travelling China, Iran, South Korea and Italy, which are among countries worst hit by the coronavirus outbreak. The government also said that Indians should avoid all non-essential travel to any other country that has been affected by

Covid-19. Simultanously, the government also issued fresh directives for foreign nationals who intend on travelling to India (read more on the fresh travel advisories here).

Export of medicine restricted: On Tuesday, the government also moved to prevent a shortage of medicine in the country. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade placed restrictions on the export of several essential medicines. According to a Business Today report, the medicines on the restricted list include paracetamol, neomycin, acyclovir, tinidazole, metronidazole, ornidazole, Vitamin B12, Vitamin B6, Vitamin B1, progesterone, clindamycin salts, erythromycin salts, chloramphenicol, and its formulations.

Disinfection of aircraft: On Tuesday, aviation regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation issued new guidelines making it mandatory for all aircraft from South Korea, Japan and Italy to be disinfected on arrival. In an advisory, DGCA all such aircraft must be disinfected before a fresh set of passengers boards the plane. Buses used to transport passenger on planes arriving from South Korea, Japan and Italy too will need to be mandatorily disinfected.

THE WUHAN EVACUATION

India's first brush with the coronavirus outbreak was a mammoth operation undertaken by the government to rescue and evacuate Indian citizens stuck in China's Wuhan and on a cruise ship anchored off Japan's coast.

National carrier Air India flew three emergency flights -- two to Wuhan and one to Tokyo -- to bring back Indian citizens from the respective cities. The two Air India flights to Wuhan rescued nearly 650 Indians while Tokyo flight brought back around 120 Indians who were stranded on Diamond Princess, a cruise ship that was quarantined off the Japanese coast after people onboard got infected with coronavirus.

Simultaneously, an Indian Air Force transport aircraft, which flew to Wuhan with emergency medical supplies, rescued another set of Indians from the virus-hit city on its return journey. All the evacuees from China and Japan underwent 14-day quarantines back home. Most of them have been released after testing negative for Covid-19.

So, in short: There have been six confirmed cases of coronavirus in India. Three of these -- all from Kerala -- later tested negative and the patients were discharged after treatment. The three new patients -- reported in Delhi, Hyderabad and Jaipur this week -- are under isolation at different hospitals and the government is working on tracking people the patients came in contact with. Globally, coronavirus has infected more than 89,000 people in over 60 countries and has killed more than 3,000 people in around 8 countries as of March 3.

3.2 Covid-19: India to ease flight ban on Iran

Source: livemint.com, 7 March, 2020

An IranAir Airbus A300 aircraft arrives over the top of residential houses to land at Heathrow Airport in west London, Britain, February 27, 2020

- The ban has been eased to allow stranded citizens from the two countries to return to their respective homes

- Once the swabs are tested in Indian laboratories and cleared, the people will be allowed to return to India in subsequent flights

India's civil aviation minister Hardeep Puri said the government will ease the ban on flights from Iran, imposed in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, to allow stranded citizens from the two countries to return to their respective homes.

The government had suspended flights to and from Iran on 26 February. Three weekly flights were being operated by Iranian carriers to Delhi and Mumbai prior to the suspension. The first flight from Iran, which will be operated by Mahan Air, is due to land in the national capital late on Friday. It will carry sample swabs of 301 stranded Indian citizens in the West Asian country—one of the worst hit by the virus. Once the swabs are tested in Indian laboratories and cleared, the people will be allowed to return to India in

subsequent flights, aviation secretary Pradeep S. Kharola said. The Director General of Civil Aviation said that once the flights from Iran land in India, the aircraft will be fully disinfected through a process that would take 2-3 hours. Ground staff have been provided protective gear against the virus, he added. Aviation minister Puri also said that a Wings India 2020 aviation conference, scheduled to take place in Hyderabad between 12 and 15 March, and for which representatives from 100 countries were expected to participate, will be scaled down because of the virus outbreak.

3.3 Coronavirus update: Five more people test positive for COVID-19 in Kerala

Source: livemint.com,8 March,2020

Earlier, India's first three positive cases had been reported from Kerala. All the three patients, medical students from Wuhan, have been treated and dischard

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM : Five more people from Kerala, three with recent travel history to Italy, have tested positive for coronavirus following which the state has been put on high alert, state health minister K.K. Shailaja said here on Sunday.

The three, a couple and their son, had evaded health screening at the airport on their return about a week ago and all the five hail from Ranni in Pathnamthitta district, she said.

"As of now their condition is stable. But there is need to take extra care", the minister said.

The fresh cases have been reported days after the southern state had successfully treated India's first three coronavirus patients -medical students from Wuhan- who have been discharged from hospitals.

Their home quarantine period is also over.

While the three, a couple in their fifties and their 24-year old son, had taken a flight from Italy to India on February 29, two others affected are their relatives, the minister said.

As a matter of abundant caution, two nonagenerian members of the family will be shifted to the Kottayam Medical College hospital, she added.

The three, who had returned from Venice, had not informed authorities that they had come back from Italy.

When two of their relatives had sought treatment at private and taluk hospitals with virus symptoms, the health authorities came to know about the travel history of the people who returned to Italy.

They had evaded screening at the airport and were reluctant to get admitted at the hospital initially, she said adding they had at first refused to cooperate with health officials and were forcefully admitted to the isolation ward of the Pathnamathitta general hospital and are under observation.

They were admitted to hospital on March 6 and their tests had been confirmed on Saturday night, she said.

"The Italy-returned family hid their travel details from the health authorities. Such practises have to seen as a crime. Those who come from countries like Iran, Italy, South Korea and China should report to the health department immediately," Shailaja said.

The government also released the flight details of the three persons who travelled from Venice.

They took the Venice-Doha Qatar airlines QR 126 flight on February 29 which reached at 11.30 pm.

For one and half hours they were at the Doha airport and took another Qatar Airlines flight QR514 to Kochi and arrived at 8.20 am on March 1 and took a private car to their home at Pathnamthitta district.

All the passengers who travelled in the two flights should get in touch with health authorities, the minister said.

The report of the five new cases comes a day ahead of "Attukal Pongal" festival in Kerala on Monday when thousands of women from various parts of Kerala and outside, including foreigners are expected to participate.

There need not be any concern with regard to Pongala. But persons showing any symptoms of the virus should keep away from the ritual, she said.

Devaswom officials would be asked to ensure that people with fever or any other symptoms do not participate in the festivity.

Medical stall and ambulances will be stationed near the temple complex. "Video clippings of the festivities would also be taken," the minister said.

3.4 Lockdown in Kerala as six new cases of Covid-19 surface

Source: thehindubusinessline.com,10 March,2020

Schools, colleges to close from Wednesday; exams as per schedule

Kerala has announced a major clampdown on public functions in the state, and is closing down schools and colleges with six new cases of Covid-19 being reported on Tuesday. The total number of infected people in the state has risen to 15, with the first three — also the country's first — having been discharged after recovery.

The six new cases have been identified as high-risk contacts of a three-member family that had arrived from virus-hit Italy in Kochi on February 29, and who had proceeded home unscreened to Ranni in Pathanamthitta district.

Only exams allowed

The government is trying its best to contain the spread of the dreaded virus, which had opened a new front with the family likely infecting thousands of people by visiting kin, various places of worship, public offices, and supermarkets.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan told newspersons here after a meeting of the Cabinet that regular classes will stop in all educational institutions, including colleges and professional institutions, from tomorrow (Wednesday) as a step in abundant precaution. Only scheduled examinations (SSLC and Higher Secondary) will be allowed in schools. There will also be a ban on summer vacation classes/tuitions.

Avoid mass gatherings

Theatres too have been asked to close down till March-end. Staging of dramas/shows will not be allowed. The government is taking up with the Centre the case of those employed abroad who risk loss of jobs due to restrictions on travel. The DGP of police has been directed to update the Health Department details of foreign nationals/citizens currently travelling in the state.

Centres of worship are being requested to avoid conducting major festivals to prevent mass gatherings. This will apply for even the hill shrine of Sabarimala where only daily rituals will be carried out, without formal darshans. The State government will also cancel all mass contact programmes and public functions. The ongoing session of the Legislative Assembly will run its course.

Violation of law

All international travellers arriving at airports/ports should disclose their country/city of origin and any attempt to evade screening or hide symptoms will be deemed as violation of law and accordingly acted upon. The government is reaching out to private hospitals in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. Carriers of the virus must strictly observe quarantine/isolation and avoid contacting others.

The government will also work with resident associations in urban areas and ASHA workers to identify those who have arrived from international destinations. While there is no cause for alarm, there is utmost need to observe caution, the Chief Minister said. The government is exploring the possibility of sourcing/manufacturing adequate quantities of face masks and sanitisers.

3.5 Coronavirus update: Karnataka man died of Covid-19, is India's first fatality

Source: livemint.com,13 March,2020

- The 76-year old man from Kalburgi who passed away on Wednesday and was a suspected coronavirus patient has been confirmed for COVID-19, the Karnataka govt said

- Mohammed Hussain Siddiq was being treated at a hospital in Kalaburagi for showing symptoms like breathlessness, cold and cough after he returned from Saudi on 29 Feb.

BENGALURU : The Karnataka government on Thursday confirmed that Mohammed Hussain Siddiq who died on Wednesday was first fatality in India due to novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

"The 76-year old man from Kalburgi who passed away and was a suspected COVID-19 patient has been confirmed for COVID-19," the Karnataka health department said in a statement late on Thursday.

Siddiq died on Tuesday night on his way back from Hyderabad to Kalaburagi, about 575 kms from Bengaluru.

The centre confirmed the cause of death as "co-morbidity" and also for testing positive for the virus.

The centre, in a statement late on Thursday, said that the deceased visited Saudi Arabia from 29th January 2020 to 29th February 2020.

After landing in Hyderabad, he went to Kalaburagi. The patient was known to have hypertension and asthma and had developed symptoms on 6 March.

"On 9th March 2020, the symptoms got aggravated and he was shifted to a private hospital in Kalaburgi. In this private hospital he was provisionally diagnosed as "mid zone Viral Pneumonia" and "suspected COVID-19."

Though his samples were taken only on 9 March, the hospital authorities discharged the patient on the insistence of the family and took him to Hyderbad.

The centre even stating that the family refused to listen to the Kalaburagi Deputy Commissioner and transferred the patient "without his knowledge."

The death of Siddiq has left several questions unanswered unanswered including indications of procedural lapses that let a heavily symptomatic patient leave one medical facility, go to Hyderabad and then be sent back in a day. "The necessary contact tracing, isolation and other measures as per protocol are being carried out. Telangana government has also been informed since he went to a private hospital there," the health department said.

Siddiq was being treated at a hospital in Kalaburagi for showing symptoms like breathlessness, cold and cough after he returned from Saudi Arabia on 29 February.

Siddiq's case adds to the fears around the COVID-19 and its rapid spread in India, that has so far infected at least 79 people in the country.

Siddiq's positive test results takes the total number of cases in Karnataka to 6, and the first outside Bengaluru.

There are three other males, one woman and one 13 year old child who have been confirmed do far.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Wednesday declared the outbreak of Covid-19 a pandemic. Since the outbreak, the virus has affected over 114 countries, whose effects are being felt in financial markets and businesses world over.

Covid-19 has infected at least 118000 people and taken 4291 deaths, according to a statement on Wednesday made by World Health Organisation's director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The Indian government on Wednesday suspended visas of all foreign nationals with effect from 13 March till 15 April.

The death of Siddiq has left several questions unanswered unanswered including indications of procedural lapses that let a heavily symptomatic patient leave one medical facility, go to Hyderabad and then be sent back in a day.

Health officials said that they would determine all angles in its investigation into the case and also said that the isolation of Siddiq could have been for other infections like H1N1, that continues to be a health hazard in Karnataka.

Siddiq also had pneumonia, hypertension and asthma among other ailments, officials said.

Officials said that Saudi Arabia does not have local transmission or that the infection could have occured in transit.

There are a total of four confirmed positive cases in Karnataka that includes a senior executive at a software firm, with a travel history from America and Dubai, his wife and daughter and one other unrelated person who is a software engineer with a travel history from USA to London and then to Bengaluru. The fifth patient has a travel history to Greece.

Information Technology and other companies in Bengaluru have been asked to stop travel to onsite locations to contain the spread of the virus. Health officials said that they will meet with IT companies on Thursday and ask them not to share information on the patients. The school in which the daughter of the first positive patient in Bengaluru has recommended that all 28 classmates are under isolation and other students be under medical observation and report if they develop symptoms. A total of 2666 people are being monitored for possibly coming in contact with the first patient that include a few hundred school students.

3.6 India is now testing random lung infection cases for COVID-19 to detect community spread

Source: theprint.in,17 March,2020

ICMR scientist Raman R. Gangakhedkar says a positive sample among patients without a travel history would mean active transmission of coronavirus in community.

New Delhi: Health authorities in India have started collecting random samples from patients suffering from influenza-like symptoms and those admitted to intensive care units with severe respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia, even those without a travel history abroad, and testing them for COVID-19.

Raman R. Gangakhedkar, head of the epidemiology and communicable diseases department at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), said a positive sample among these patients without a travel history would mean active transmission of coronavirus in the community.

The ICMR scientist, however, said no evidence of community transmission has been found in India as of now. "As a scientist my immediate worry is to find evidence of community transmission. Currently we are not, but our job is to find the evidence."

He said India is conducting surveillance on influenza-like illnesses (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) to determine whether the virus has spread across the community.

Amid questions about India's testing efficacy, Gangakhedkar said the country has been testing random samples on a weekly basis since March 15. He said 52 regional labs across 27 states are set to collect 20 samples a week and test them for COVID-19, adding the latest reports would be known Wednesday.

Earlier, the ICMR had reported that 150 such random samples were taken between 15 February and 29 February, none of which tested positive for COVID-19.

From 30 January to 16 March, the ICMR scientist said, 9,100 samples have been tested for COVID-19, of which 114 have tested positive. The ICMR's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme monitors the testing process in the country.

While India has the capacity to test 10,000 samples a day at its 67 testing centres, it has been conducting about 600 every day. The ICMR is now looking at expanding to 120 laboratories and increasing the overall testing kits from 2 lakh to 10 lakh, Gangakhedkar said.

India at stage two of transmission

According to Gangakhedkar, there are four stages of disease transmission, and India is at stage two.

Stage one of disease transmission is when it is restricted to imported cases, stage two is local transmission when the contacts of the imported cases are affected, stage three is community transmission where the source of the infection is not easy to identify, and stage four is when it becomes an epidemic.

India has a 30-day window to halt community transmission, ICMR scientists had said on 13 February. Gangakhedkar said all 114 confirmed cases of coronavirus in the country have been among those whose infection can be traced to foreign travel.

Country to enforce social distancing

India has proposed social distancing interventions as a 'non-pharmaceutical' intervention to control and prevent the spread of the disease in the community, according to Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The interventions include closure of educational institutions, gyms, museums, theatres and social and cultural centres. Interventions also include encouraging private organisations to allow work from home, postponing competitions and sporting events and limiting weddings to a small gathering and regulating mass gatherings with the help of local authorities.

The government has also advised against non-essential travel and ensuring maximum social distancing in public transport besides ensuring regular and proper disinfection of surfaces.

Agarwal said these social distancing interventions shall be in force until 31 March and will be reviewed according to the situation.

3.7 Coronavirus in India: Confirmed cases of Covid-19 climb to 194

Source: indiatoday.in,19 March,2020

The confirmed number of coronavirus positive cases in India increased to 194 after fresh cases emerged from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Chattisgarh.

The total number of reported novel coronavirus cases in India climbed to 194 after 25 new cases emerged from different parts of the country on Thursday.

Total cases in India include 32 foreign nationals -- 17 from Italy, seven from Indonesia, three from Philippines, two from UK, one each belonging to Canada, Indonesia and Singapore. India's tally of Covid-19 cases also includes three deaths reported from Delhi, Karnataka and Maharashtra. As many as 16 people have been discharged so far, including the three patients from Kerala who were discharged last month. Follow LIVE UPDATES on coronavirus outbreak

Delhi has, so far, reported 10 positive cases which includes one foreigner, while Uttar Pradesh has recorded 16 cases.

Eleven new coronavirus cases emerged from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh on Thursday.

In Karnataka, a new novel coronavirus case was reported in Karnataka on Thursday, taking the total number of infections to 15 in the state. In Chhattisgarh, a 24-year-old woman tested positive on Thursday. She has travel history to London.

Four more, meanwhile, tested positive for Covid-19 in Maharashtra on Thursday. With this, Maharashtra now has 49 cases, including three foreigners.

Chandigarh reported its first case on Thursday with a 23-year-old woman testing positive for the novel coronavirus. The Chandigarh resident had recently returned from the UK.

Another positive case was reported in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday, taking the total number of confirmed cases in the state to two -- one each in Nellore and Prakasam districts.

In Uttar Pradesh, two people tested positive, taking the state tally to 19 on Thursday.

Kashmir on Wednesday had recorded its first positive case for novel coronavirus in Srinagar. The mayor of Srinagar Municipal Corporation informed on Twitter that a Srinagar resident had tested positive.

In Tamil Nadu, a 21-year-old student from Dublin, Ireland has tested positive for Covid-19. The count in Tamil Nadu has reached 3 now.

In Uttarakhand, two IFS officers have tested positive for coronavirus.

India's death toll climbed to four after one more died in Punjab.

Gujarat reported the first cases of coronavirus on Thursday with two cases reported from Rajkot and Surat.

The mayor asked people of Srinagar stay at their homes from Thursday morning and do not venture out unnecessarily. The first case in Kashmir took Jammu and Kashmir's tally to four. The Union Territory of Ladakh, meanwhile, has reported eight positive cases so far.

Telangana saw the highest number of reported cases on Wednesday after a group of seven Indonesians and a youth, who returned from Scotland, tested positive for Covid-19. The number of coronavirus cases in Telangana has now reached 13. An Indonesian citizen, who was part of the group, had already positive for the virus on Tuesday.

On Thursday, Telangana reported one more fresh case who has a travel history to Dubai. The person was admitted to Gandhi Hospital on March 18 after his arrival from Dubai on 14th. By 11 pm on Thursday, two more cases were reported from Hyderabad in Telangana.

Kerala has recorded 27 cases which include two foreign nationals. After no reports of any new case for two days, the state reported one case from Kasaragod on Thursday. Delhi has so far reported 10 cases which include one foreigner.

With three fresh cases on Wednesday, Rajasthan has now seven cases, two foreigners. Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Uttarakhand and Punjab have reported one case each. Karnataka has 14 coronavirus patients. In Haryana, there are 17 cases, which include fourteen foreigners.

As per the Union Health Ministry, over 5,700 people, who had come in contact with these positive cases, continue to be under rigorous surveillance.

ARMY SOLDIER TESTS POSITIVE

The Indian Army reported its first coronavirus case after a 34-year-old soldier of Ladakh Scout regiment tested positive, prompting the force to strengthen its check and prevention mechanism and suspend war games and training activities. An Army officer attached to the College of Military Engineering in Pune was also on Wednesday asked to self-quarantine after he showed symptoms of flu.

The soldier from the Ladakh Scout regiment tested positive for the virus after he came in contact with his father, who had returned from a pilgrimage in Iran by an Air India flight on February 20 and tested positive for Covid-19, army sources had said.

A resident of Chuhot village in Leh, the soldier was on leave from February 25 and rejoined duty on March 2, sources said, adding that he was quarantined on March 7 and tested positive on March 16. Even the soldier's brother has tested positive, the sources had said.

WHAT ABOUT INDIANS STRANDED ABROAD

As far as Indians stranded abroad, the Ministry of External Affairs has said the total number of citizens infected by coronavirus overseas is 276 -- 255 in Iran, 12 in UAE, five in Italy, and one each in Hong Kong, Kuwait, Rwanda and Sri Lanka.

Giving the details of Indians in Iran, one of the worst affected countries by coronavirus, the MEA said the stranded nationals include about 1,100 pilgrims mainly from Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra.

There are also nearly 300 students primarily from J&K, about 1,000 fishermen, including from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, and others who are on a long-term stay in Iran for pursuing their livelihood and religious studies, he added.

As of March 16, 389 Indians, including 205 pilgrims and 183 students, have been repatriated in four batches on board special flights of the Indian Air Force and Iranian airlines, he said.

EFFECT ON EDUCATION SECTOR

With most of the schools and colleges shut down, the Human Resource Development Ministry has announced that it will launch e-classes on Swayam Prabha DTH channels for school students, while the CBSE has postponed class 10 and 12 board exams and said the examination will be rescheduled after March 31.

The HRD Ministry's National Testing Agency (NTA) also postponed the Joint Entrance Exam (JEE-Main) for admission to IITs and engineering colleges.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court took suo motu cognizance of the non-availability of mid-day meals and issued notices to the states and union territories asking them how children were being provided mid-day meals amid the shut down.

ENTRY FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES TEMPORARILY BANNED

The Home Ministry on Wednesday said India has temporarily banned entry of passengers from 36 countries while people travelling from 11 countries will be mandatorily quarantined in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

The government on Tuesday had banned the entry of passengers from Afghanistan, Philippines and Malaysia to India with immediate effect, according to an additional travel

advisory. This instruction is a temporary measure and shall be in force till March 31 and will be reviewed subsequently.

The government has also banned the entry of passengers from the European Union countries, Turkey and the UK from March 18 till March 31

3.8 Coronavirus cases cross 235 in India; offices shut in Mumbai, strict restrictions in Delhi

Source: financialexpress.com,20 March,2020

Coronavirus Cases In India: Several fresh positive cases of Coronavirus were reported today taking the total number to over 235. The Maharashtra government has ordered closure of offices, shops in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur till March 31.

Coronavirus News: With several new cases of Coronavirus being reported from across the country, several cities have announced virtual lockdown to stop the spread of the deadly infection.

Metro services in Delhi, Metro, Bengaluru will not be available on Sunday, March 22 – the day PM Modi has called for Janata Curfew. Jaipur Metro has stopped services till Sunday with immediate effect.

The Maharashtra government on Thursday announced closure of offices and shops in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur till March 31. Shops selling essential commodities will only remain open in these cities.

Train services across the country would remain curtailed on Sunday. A number of passenger trains have been cancelled.

The number of Coronavirus case continues to jump in India as the government has stepped up preventive measures to prevent the virus from creating more damage to the Indian economy and society.

As of today, there are as many as 236 cases reported in the country out of which 32 are foreign nationals while the rest of them are Indians. Indian health officials and doctors have been able to cure 19 people who were infected with the COVID-19 but could not save the lives of 4 people.

All shops, except those selling essential commodities, have been asked to remain close till March 31 in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur

Prime Minister Modi on Thursday addressed the nation in a bid to bring calmness to the people of India amid the increasing rage from the Coronavirus.

He urged the countrymen to go for a self-imposed curfew- Janata Curfew to bring about isolation in our society, which is very much essential part of containment against the Coronavirus.

The government has also announced that no commercial international flights will be allowed to land in India from Sunday, March 22 for a week as cases of Coronavirus continue to rise in the country.

In developments today, the University Grants Council (UGC) asked universities to postpone exams till March 31. Also, CBSE, ICSE board class 10,12 exams have been postponed till March 31.

In view of the COVID-19 outbreak, Sebi has given a 45-day extension to companies for filing Q4 results — this is a month-long grace for filing FY20 results due to coronavirus pandemic.

3.9 India coronavirus, COVID-19, March 29: India's confirmed cases jumped from 5 on March 2, to 1,000 cases on March 29

Source: zeenews.india.com,29 March,2020

The coronavirus pandemic has engulfed the entire world and has posed serious challenges for the health and economic security of millions of people worldwide. In India too, the spread of coronavirus has been alarming.

The total number of COVID-19 cases in India on Sunday morning reached 918 out of which 819 are active cases, 79 recovered, 19 deaths and 1 migrated patient. as per Ministry of Health.

The coronavirus pandemic has engulfed the entire world and has posed serious challenges for the health and economic security of millions of people worldwide.

In India too, the spread of coronavirus has been alarming.

The total number of COVID-19 cases in India on Sunday reached 979 out of which 867 are active cases, 86 recovered, 25 deaths and 1 migrated patient, as per Ministry of Health.

INDIA'S COVID-19 BATTLE IN NUMBERS

TIMES NOW | ACTION BEGINS HERE | TIMESNOWNEWS.COM

Updated @9PM | 31/3/2020

NAME OF STATE/UT	CONFIRMED CASES	CURED/ MIGRATED	DEATH
Andaman & Nicobar Island	10	0	0
Andhra Pradesh	40	1	0
Bihar	15	0	1
Chhattisgarh	8	0	0
Delhi	97	6	2
Goa	5	0	0
Gujarat	73	3	6
Haryana	40	21	0
Himachal Pradesh	3	0	1
Karnataka	83	5	3
Kerala	234	19	1
Madhya Pradesh	47	0	3
Maharashtra	216	39	9
Manipur	1	0	0
Mizoram	1	0	0
Odisha	3	0	0
Puducherry	1	0	0
Punjab	41	1	3
Rajasthan	74	3	0
Tamil Nadu	74	4	1
Telangana	79	1	1
Chandigarh	13	0	0
Jammu and Kashmir	54	2	2
Ladakh	13	3	0
Uttar Pradesh	101	14	0
Uttarakhand	7	2	0
West Bengal	26	0	2
Total	**1397 #**	**124**	**35**

#Remaining 38 cases are being assigned to states to initiate contact tracing

In the wake of rising challenges due to the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday announced the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund' (PM CARES Fund), a public charitable trust.

The fund has been set up so that the people who want to contribute can do so by following a few simple steps which will help the government tide over the major COVID-19 hurdle.

3.10 Coronavirus cases in India: 1,397 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 35 deaths, 1,238 active cases as on March 31 @9 pm

Source: timesnownews.com,31 March,2020

New Delhi: Cases of coronavirus are rising at an exponential rate, faster than experts and scientists had anticipated a couple of months ago. The 'novel' virus has so far infected around 786,000 people across the world, and close to 38,000 people have succumbed to the Covid-19 pandemic so far.

India has seen a sudden spike in cases over the past couple of days, with 146 people testing positive in just the past 24 hours.

As per the latest bulletin released by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Kerala and Maharashtra have the maximum number of cases at 234 and 216, respectively. Delhi (97), Karnataka (83), Rajasthan (74) and Uttar Pradesh (101) are the other badly-affected states.

Almost all countries and territories in the world have positive Covid-19 cases, the worst affected being the United States of America, Italy, Spain, China, Germany, France, Iran, and the United Kingdom.

The pandemic broke out in Wuhan in China's Hubei province three months ago but has spread across the entire world in less than two months of the first reported case.

The World Health Organisation had declared it a pandemic over a

month ago and issued strict guidelines of hygiene and social distancing. However, several people across the world, including India, continue to defy the directives and put others' lives at risk, as the only way to contain the spread of Covid-19 is by distancing oneself from others.

Since there is no vaccine for the disease so far, the recovery rate of patients testing positive is very low due to the rapid rate of mutating of the virus in the host.

With a population of 130 crore people, India is extremely wary of the impact of the pandemic in case it hits at the rate it has in Europe and the US.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24 announced a complete lockdown in all states and Union Territories across India for 21 days. Barring essential supplies such as food and medical emergencies, people have been advised to stay indoors.

APRIL 2020

4.1 Rise in coronavirus cases because of Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi: Health Ministry

Source: timesnownews.com,1 April,2020

New Delhi: The Union Health Ministry on Wednesday (April 1) confirmed 1,637 coronavirus cases in the country and 38 COVID-19-related deaths.

The government said that the number of Novel Coronavirus cases has spiked because of the religious congregation in Delhi's Nizamuddin area, and 386 people have been found to be infected with the deadly virus since yesterday.

While addressing the press along with the officials from the Home Ministry and ICMR, Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal attributed the steep increase in the coronavirus cases to Tablighi Jammat-organised religious congregation at Alami Markaz in New Delhi's Nizamuddin area earlier this month.

As several people who had attended the religious congregation in the national capital, have returned to their respective hometown, the state governments have been asked to initiate rigorous contact tracing and containment strategies, Agarwal said.

Agarwal said that 1800 people related to Tablighi Jamaat have been sent to 9 hospitals and quarantine centres, adding that the recent rise in cases does not represent a national trend. States have been asked to carry out intensive drives to ensure tests of those who came in contact with the affected people, he stated.

Reiterating that social distancing was the best solution to win the fight against COVID, the Health Ministry official said, "We urge people to follow guidelines during lockdown period, avoid congregations and religious gatherings."

5,000 railway coaches have been modified to set up quarantine facilities, the Health Ministry official stated, adding that the Indian Railways is also setting up 3.2 lakh isolation and quarantine beds and 20,000 coaches being modified in the process.

Home Ministry spokesperson said that the states and Union Territories are ensuring delivery of essential services and items. Commenting on the migrants' issue, the official confirmed that 21,486 relief camps have been set up across the country and 6,75,133 have been provided shelter. She also stated that 25 lakh people are being provided with daily meals.

While addressing the media persons at the same forum, the ICMR official state that 47,951 tests for COVID-19 have been conducted in the country so far out of which 4,562 tests were done at ICMR network labs.

4.2 'COVID-19 cases may peak in India by April end'

Source: indiatvnews.com,3 April,2020

The Indian Chest Society (ICS) has evaluated that India is likely to experience its peak in terms positive Covid-19 cases by the end of April.

"We are one month behind the US. So we need to expect the cases to peak by late April or early May. However, the effectiveness of lockdown may delay the same," D.J. Christopher, Head, Indian Chest Society, said in a statement.

The lockdown will definitely help in slowing down the escalation of cases as well as the mortality rate as was experienced during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1919.

The rationale behind the 21-day nationwide lockdown is based on the balance between the incubation period and the expected natural course of the spread of the virus and its impact, the statement said.
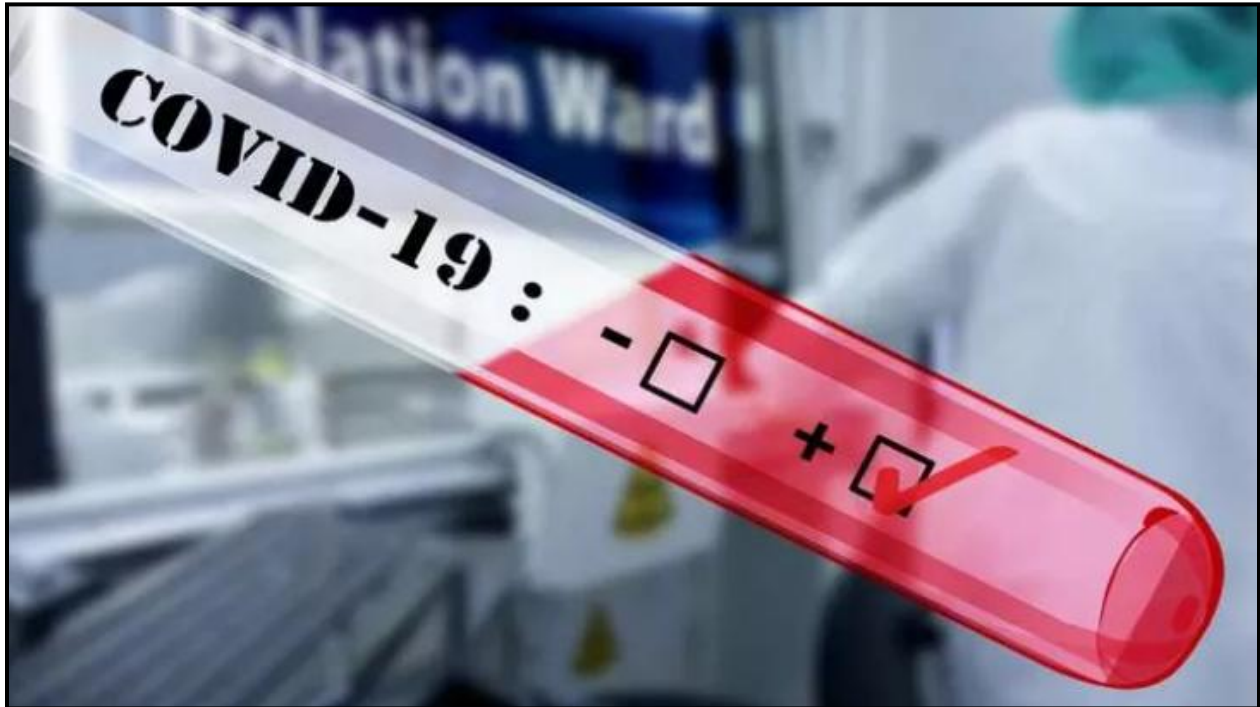
In a webinar conducted recently on Covid-19 preparedness and healthcare workers' protection, the ICS concluded that the long working hours and continuous exposure to high risk patients is the cause behind the increasing risk of contracting Covid-19 among the healthcare workers.

"Working continuously for more than 10 hours in high-risk COVID care area, respiratory aerosol generating procedures, inadequate hand hygiene practices and inadequate PPE has been found to increase the chance of infection among the healthcare workers," it said.

4.3 Covid-19: Centre may extend lockdown after Apr 14 as states, experts make request

Source: hindustantimes.com,7 April,2020

Centre thinking of extending Covid-19 lockdown after April 14 as states, experts make request

Telangana CM requested PM Modi to extend the lockdown, while a top Uttar Pradesh bureaucrat said the state may not lift the lockdown on April 14.

The Centre is mulling extending the 21-day lockdown, which will end on April 14, till the end of the month after many states and experts made a request for it, sources in the government said on Tuesday.

Just on Monday, Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekhar Rao had said he will appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to extend lockdown to check the spread of coronavirus in the country. It was announced on March 24 by the Prime Minister.

Rao also cautioned that if the Covid-19 lockdown is lifted it could cost lives.

Before KCR, as the Telangana chief minister is popularly known, a top bureaucrat in Uttar Pradesh also hinted that the lockdown may not be lifted in the state on April 14.

A senior bureaucrat in Punjab has also favoured an extension of the lockdown. On Friday, a minister in Maharashtra, the worst-hit state in the country, also said that the restriction should not end on April 14.

The lockdown came into effect on March 25, a day after Prime Minister Modi addressed the nation, saying that the step was being taken to break the chain of infection and control the spread of coronavirus disease Covid-19. He also urged people to avoid travel and stay wherever they are.

Earlier today, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu said the final week of the ongoing lockdown is "critical" for evolving an exit strategy as data regarding the spread of coronavirus will have a bearing on the decision to be taken by the government.

He also appealed to the people to abide by whatever decision is ultimately taken by the government and cooperate with the same spirit that has so far been evident "even if it meant to continue with some degree of hardship still beyond April 14".

"As today marks the completion of two weeks of nationwide lockdown in force since March 25, I thought it appropriate to reach out to the people and the leadership of the country with my views and concerns amidst current efforts to tide over the crisis caused by the outbreak of coronavirus," Naidu said in a statement.

The lockdown, acknowledged by experts as a necessary preventive measure, has disrupted economic activity and caused an exodus of migrant workers from cities towards their villages.

4.4 Covid-19: Odisha becomes the first state to extend lockdown till April 30

Source: business-standard.com,9 April,2020

Patnaik said the state has also urged the Centre to stop train and flight services to Odisha till April 30.

The Odisha government on Thursday decided to extend the ongoing lockdown in the state till April 30 to effectively contain the spread of coronavirus. The decision comes amid growing speculations over extending the nationwide shutdown beyong April 14 to counter the pandemic.

Schools and other education institutions will remain closed till June 17, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik announced after a video conference with his ministers.

"We have decided to extend the lockdown period till April 30 and a recommendation in this regard will be sent to the Centre," he said in a video message.

Patnaik said the state has also urged the Centre to stop train and flight services to Odisha till April 30.

A man walks past closed shops in the wake of deadly coronavirus

Odisha has recorded 44 positive cases of coronavirus so far. A 51-year-old woman from Dhenkanal town tested positive for COVID-19 while an elderly man from West Bengal's Medinipur district was also diagnosed with the infection here, a senior official said.

People maintain social distancing while standing in queues to buy essential items from shops at APMC market, during ongoing COVID-19 lockdown, in Navi Mumbai

"Two new COVID-19 positive cases confirmed today," the Health and Family Welfare department tweeted. The 69-year-old man from West Bengal was brought to Bhubaneswar in an ambulance and admitted at a private hospital here, the official said.

Earlier, 34 cases were reported from Khurda, three from Bhadrak and one each from Cuttack, Kendrapara, Kalahandi, Puri and Jajpur. Now Dhenkanal is added to the list of districts where COVID-19 cases were detected in the state.

The nationwide lockdown was declared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24 to break the chain of coronavirus transmission and it was scheduled to be lifted on April 15.

4.5 Summer commences in India, impact on COVID-19 unclear as of now

Source: downtoearth.org.in,13 April,2020

There has been speculation about the connection between COVID-19 and higher temperatures. The summer season has started in India as temperatures have started rising in the second week of April, 2020, after a rainy and cool month of March.

The temperatures though are not as high as expected. "The extended range forecast from India Meteorological Department (IMD) already indicated that April was going to be cooler than normal and that has happened thus far," Raghu Murtugudde, climate scientist at the University of Maryland in the United States, said.

There might be a link between the unusual weather in March and early April and the decrease in air pollution and aerosol dispersal in China due to lockdowns implemented to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Murtugudde said.

"Pre-monsoon showers are not out of the question in a natural world but the biggest signal we have is the dramatic drop in greenhouse gases and aerosols / pollution," Murtugudde pointed out.

"China got clean before us and this would have impacted the elevated heating over Tibet as well as the Eurasian snow cover. Reduced aerosols also have an impact on land warming and ocean warming," he said.

"How these are all modulating the monsoon circulation and the pre-monsoon shower activity is not totally clear right now from observations. Some modelling studies are being performed, which will shed some light soon enough," he added.

Maximum temperatures crossed the 40 degrees Celsius mark in parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh on April 11. These values were 1-4°C above normal, according to data from IMD.

The rest of India has much lower maximum temperatures. In fact, large parts of eastern, central and southern parts of the country still have maximum temperatures 1-3°C below normal.

The IMD earlier predicted a warmer than usual summer season this year. Average maximum temperatures are likely to be warmer than usual by 0.5-1°C for April-May-June according to the latest seasonal outlook for temperatures released by IMD.

These temperatures will be warmer-than-usual over east and west Rajasthan, west Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Konkan and Goa, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, north and south interior Karnataka, coastal Karnataka, Rayalaseema and Kerala.

Weather and COVID-19

There is a link between weather factors such as temperature and humidity on the spread of the CoVID-19 pandemic according to experts but they are still unsure about the exact impact.

There are two ways that scientists explore the relationship between weather and the spread of diseases, according to a rapid expert consultation published by the US National Academies Press on April 7, 2020.

This assessment was conducted by the members of the National Academies' Standing Committee on Emerging Infectious Diseases and 21st century Health Threats.

The first way is through laboratory experiment studies conducted by spreading an artificially grown version of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes CoVID-19 disease, within controlled environmental conditions and observing its behaviour.

The second way is through natural history studies which take into account the spread of the disease in actual environmental conditions in different places throughout the year. Both these methods have their shortfalls.

While for experimental studies, the controlled environmental conditions are never close enough to the real-life conditions, for natural histories there are too many factors involved to pin point the exact causes of the spread of the disease.

It is also difficult to bring the results of these two ways to come to a conclusion as they are so different from each other.

Laboratory data available so far indicated reduced survival of the virus at elevated temperatures, the paper stated. For instance, a research paper from Hong Kong said there was around 50 per cent reduction in the concentration of the virus in seven days at 22°C while there was no detection of virus after 14 days.

At 37°C, the time period of 50 per cent reduction was reduced to just one day and no virus was detected after that, showing that an increase in temperature does have an effect on the survival of the virus.

The relationship of the virus with temperature changes with the surface it is present on, with time, the paper said. The virus can survive on printing and tissue paper for three hours, on cloth for two days and on stainless steel for seven days.

One alarming result was that there was some virus left on personnel protection equipment masks even on the seventh day after it was introduced, perhaps hinting at the reason why many medical professionals at the forefront of CoVID-19 treatment and control are getting infected by the disease.

Another study being conducted at the Tulane University National Primate Research Centre in Louisiana suggests that the SARS-CoV-2 virus might have a longer half-life than the influenza virus, SARS-CoV-1 virus, monkeypox virus and tuberculosis bacteria at 23°C and 50 per cent relative humidity.

The scientists caution that the number of well-controlled studies is small in number right now and the survival properties of the real-world virus might be different to the artificially grown studies being used in these studies.

Most of the laboratories are also unable to control humidity levels efficiently, leading to improper testing conditions. Moreover, the testing conditions in all these experiments are different from one another which means that no correlations or conclusions can be drawn from them. More data is expected in the current week and next, especially related to the relationship between the virus and humidity and ultra-violet radiation.

On the other hand, natural history studies remain even more inconclusive regarding the seasonality of CoVID-19 because of poor data quality and a paucity of time since the beginning of the pandemic to draw effective conclusions.

Even though some studies do suggest that the spread of the disease might slow down in higher ambient temperatures and humidities, the slowing down might not be significant as the human population lacks immunity to the virus as of now.

"There are some papers claiming that there is a relation between temperature and humidity and COVID infections and mortalities. But this signal may be true in a natural system and we have moved the virus by human travel and may be also by shipments into regions," Murtugudde said.

So it is hard to separate the environmental impacts right now.

"One clue is that the midlatitude countries tend to have a strong seasonality in flu and to the extent that CoVID-19 is a flu-like disease, it may end up becoming seasonal," Murtugudde said.

Tropics do not have seasonal flu. Rather, it can occur anytime. "Like all life forms, coronavirus will also have a range of tolerance for surviving in the open environment but what is most important now is to see what it does once it finds a host after being transported by travel and shipments," Murtugudde concluded.

4.6 Covid-19: What you need to know today

Source: hindustantimes.com,13 April,2020

Till March 23, there were 499 Covid-19 cases in India. The number rose to 2,543 till April 2. On April 12, the count stood at 9,191. The death toll rose from 10 to 72 to 326 in this period.

As India nears the 10,000 cases mark — Covid-19 infections touched 9,191 on Sunday, and there have been 326 deaths so far — it is clear that the virus is still following its own trajectory in India. Many scientists expected that this would change at some point. It hasn't (and to celebrate, this column is going to be repetitive, but with fresh numbers).

Till March 23, there were 499 Covid-19 cases in India. The number rose to 2,543 till April 2. On April 12, the count stood at 9,191. The death toll rose from 10 to 72 to 326 in this period.

Till March 8, there were 541 cases in the US. The number rose to 9,296 till March 18 and 124,256 till March 28. On Sunday, the count was 545,830. The death toll rose from 22 to 150 and then 2,222. On Sunday, it stood at 21,474.

Or Italy. Till February 27, the number of cases in Italy was 593. This rose to 5,061 till March 7 and 26,062 till March 17. The death toll rose from 17 to 233 to 2,503 in this period. On Sunday, the count was a total of 156,363 cases and 19,899 deaths.

People maintain social distance at a food distribution by Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib on day nineteen of the 21 day nationwide lockdown to check the spread of coronavirus, at Chandini Chowk , in New Delhi

There is no need to get into the math — the Indian curve is a lot shallower, in terms of both infections and deaths. One explanation is that India is not testing as much as some of these countries have done.

Italy has tested 15,935 per million of its population; the US 8,138; and India 137. To be sure, both the US and Italy were laggards in testing to begin with, and then aggressively ramped up as they realised the danger posed by the pandemic.

All the numbers, other than the India tally as of Sunday evening are from the website worldometers.info

The latest Indian numbers are from HT's dashboard.

It is a fact that India has tested far too few people (the numbers will increase once the rapid test kits arrive). This could mean that there are a lot of infected people out there. Many of them may be symptomatic, but at least some will require hospitalisation, advanced care, perhaps in critical care units, and, some of them may even die. Anecdotally at least, there's no sudden surge in non-Covid mortalities in India that suggests that the disease is silently stalking people in the country's hinterland.

Clearly, India's trajectory is mystifying and needs deeper scientific research. This column has previously pointed to at least three themes being studied by scientists — the impact of temperature and humidity on Sars-Cov-2, the virus that causes Covid-19; the strain of the virus; and the relationship, if any, between immunity to the coronavirus disease and the BCG vaccine.

The coverage of the vaccine is almost universal in India, and Indian children have been given it since the late 1940s. There's more anecdotal evidence about the seeming immunity of those given the BCG vaccine to Covid-19. Spain (163,027 infections 16,606 deaths and 7,593 per million tested) gives the vaccine to children in only one region. The vaccine is universally given in Portugal (15,987 infections, 470 deaths, and 15,966 tests per million). The results of a large experiment involving frontline health care workers in Australia are awaited (they have been given the BCG vaccine). The findings will be closely studied — especially in India, where the government is working to find a way to protect lives as well as livelihoods affected by the ongoing lockdown.

That won't be easy — a quarter of India's cases are from its two most important cities from the perspective of business, Delhi and Mumbai. Gurugram, home to the local HQs of many Fortune 500 companies, has several hot spots too. It will be a while before it is business as usual in all three.

4.7 Why India has the upper hand against COVID-19

Source: weforum.org,17 April,2020

• India's 'cluster-containment' strategy means focusing on early detection of cases.

• Kerala flattened the curve via the creation of an contagion route map.

• Odisha's susceptibility to natural disaster gave it an advantage in crisis preparedness.

India, currently under 21-day lockdown, is fighting back against COVID-19 with a "cluster containment strategy" to contain the disease within a defined geographic area by early detection of cases, breaking the chain of transmission and thus preventing its spread.

As per a statement issued by the Indian Health Ministry, India will be following a strategic approach taking into account different possible scenarios – travel-related cases, local transmission of COVID-19, large outbreaks amenable to containment, and widespread community transmission of COVID-19.

India has won praise for its tough and timely response to the coronavirus crisis

The World Health Organization on Tuesday praised India for its tough and timely efforts to control the spread of coronavirus. There has been no community transmission of coronavirus since the country went into lockdown, and the growth factor of cases has declined by 40%, according to recent press briefings from the Union Health Ministry. Most of the credit goes to the states that are aggressively fighting the battle with the virus. Here are five Indian states that are proactively coming up with innovative solutions to contain the deadly virus:

Kerala

After successfully defeating the Nipah virus in 2018, Kerala has utilized this experience to contain the COVID-19 spread after a rather bumpy start. It was the first Indian state to register COVID-19 patients and topped the list at one stage. However, it has now managed to successfully flatten the curve. Out of a total 376 cases, 179 have recovered and three have unfortunately died. Active cases remain at 176.

What has worked for Kerala is its extensive testing of symptomatic cases, followed by a painstaking contact-tracing process and then publishing of the route map of an infected person, so that everyone with the potential to being infected could be put in self-isolation.

Krishna Teja, an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer working with the Kerala COVID-19 response team, said: "The reason why we have successfully been able to flatten

the curve is because of excellent inter-department coordination at all levels (state, district and village panchayats). Moreover, our chief minister addresses the citizens every evening for an hour which establishes people's faith in the system. Also, we are 100% checking the quarantine period by deploying officers to go to every household."

The state has further managed to control movement of migrant workers by building thousands of shelters following the sudden nationwide shutdown and distributing millions of cooked meals.

The government is also leveraging technology and releases essential information on a real-time basis and has launched a mobile app, GoK Direct, to check the spread of fake information. The state also started a "walk-in facility" for people to get tests safely.

Furthermore, an initiative called the CoronaSafe Network has been created, with two major components: the Corona Literacy Mission and the Corona Care Centre to create awareness on COVID-19 and for converting educational institutions into hospitals to offset for shortages.

Odisha

This eastern state of India suffers nearly 25% of India's natural disasters, which means that crisis precautions were already in place. These included cyclone shelters, now being used to house migrant workers from other states during the coronavirus outbreak.

Proactive preparedness is Odisha's hallmark, with it becoming the first Indian state to impose full lockdown (before India imposed it as a whole), and now the first to extend it until 30 April. The state classified COVID-19 as a natural disaster, like the super-cyclone of 1999. It was the first to announce exclusive COVID-19 hospitals and delivered them within a week in two districts; now every district will have one. The state is further giving free medical treatment to all COVID-19 patients.

Regarding the challenges, Chief Secretary of Government of Odisha, Asit Tripathy, said: "We were lucky to have the experience of countries like Italy before us. We saw the unintended catastrophe that happened in countries where they treated COVID patients in regular hospitals along with other patients. Therefore, our government moved very early to establish exclusive Odisha COVID hospitals across the state. We made a plan by inviting and involving private hospital operators and also corporates."

The state's containment programme was rooted in strategic use of IT. It identified the highest-risk category people coming from abroad in order to put them in home quarantine to stop the spread. Leading the country, Odisha devised an incentive program by offering INR15,000 for all foreign returning people to declare themselves on a government portal developed within 11 hours. According to the state's IT Secretary, Manoj Mishra, over 5,000

international returnees and also about 35,000 domestic returnees from COVID-19-affected states registered and were asked to home quarantine.

The government put the five most reported districts on lockdown first on 22 March. This also helped the state to have a control over the quarantine mechanism and so far according to the state's Health and Welfare Department, Odisha has recorded 60 cases (out of which 18 have recovered).

Odisha, too, has created thousands of temporary shelters for migrant workers and is providing cooked meals and counselling to all those in need. According to Subroto Bagchi, regional government spokesperson, 1,882 temporary camps have been set up to provide food and shelter to 56,926 guest workers from different states stranded due to the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

Meanwhile, the state's Mission Shakti Self Help Groups (SHGs) are making masks in bulk to avoid any shortage (wearing them outside is now mandatory). According to Sujata Karthikeyan, Director of Mission Shakti, around 605 SHGs have made 1.5 million cotton masks so far, helping protect the community and medics. More than 7,000 SHGs are working day and night to produce protection gear for those on the frontlines and also running village panchayat-level kitchen centres to cook meals for those in need: so far over 325,000 people.

The government further paid out advance social pension of four months to around 2.8 million beneficiaries.

Maharashtra

Maharashtra currently leads the table of COVID-19 positive cases with 1,872. The state has come up with a cluster containment plan to deal with the contagion and is using data analytics, drones and traditional patrolling methods to survey crowded places.

In every district, two to three drones are used to monitor movements within streets. A drone can cover a kilometre area once deployed. So it will give an aerial view of, for example, Mumbai's Marine Drive, show the arterial roads, then move into the lanes and bylanes, making movement tracking people simpler. If the police spot anybody roaming in these areas, a team is immediately dispatched to take action. The state has further started mass patrolling, reinforcing the message to stay inside.

However, according to Milind Deora, former Minister of State (MoS) with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and also former MoS with the Ministry of Shipping within the government of India, the situation in Mumbai is still extremely worrying. "The next few weeks are crucial. The response requires a multi-pronged approach wherein inputs from medical experts, essential goods suppliers and industry

should also be factored. Leaving our response only to politicians and bureaucrats can do more harm than good," he said.

Rajasthan

The Bhilwara district of Rajasthan, once the worst affected by COVID-19 with 27 cases and two deaths, is now being hailed as a model for the rest of the country. It has gone into a full lockdown backed with curfew, and the entire population went into health screening.

During the ongoing lockdown, there is no relaxation of any type, and essential items are being delivered to city residents at their doorstep; something made easier by an affluent population in the city that can afford to pay for it.

As a result, the textile hub has not reported a new case of COVID-19 since 30 March. Of 27 total cases, 17 have already recovered, bringing the number of active cases in Bhilwara to just 10.

The Bhilwara model is being replicated in other districts of Rajasthan and has received praise from the entire country.

The man in charge, District Magistrate of Bhilwara Rajendra Bhatt, said in an interview to The Print: "The success was not rocket science. We got full cooperation from the state government.

When we (at the district level) said that we need to seal the border, the government did it immediately – no questions asked. Before announcing the complete curfew, we sent our people to dairies, surveyed how much milk each household is consuming so that when we imposed the curfew, all we had to do is deliver an average amount to each house... Again, it was no rocket science."

The state has further banned spitting in public.

Uttar Pradesh

India's most populated state with over 200 million people, Uttar Pradesh has managed well to keep the cases below 500 (451 at the time of writing). The state has further sealed all the 160 hotspots completely.

Uttar Pradesh had no laboratory to test the Sars-CoV-2 pathogen when the first positive case was reported on 3 March; it now has 10. The state government has established a Covid Care Fund, and is getting support from public representatives and the general public.

The money is being used to expand testing and treatment facilities; 2,400 tests are being done daily. The government is already working to boost the manufacturing units of PPE, N95 masks, triple-layer masks, thermal analysers, ventilators and other equipment.

The state administration is making sure to provide food to all with the help of two platforms – Annapurna and Supply Mitra. The former gives location of free cooked items and food packets, while the latter is used to facilitate home delivery of groceries and other daily essential items, by providing the operating details of the traders and delivery boys involved.

The state government is already providing one-month free food grains to poor people, along with INR1,000 as compensation to daily wage workers who have been affected due to the outbreak of deadly virus.

More than 37,000 labourers registered with the labour department will be compensated through a DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) scheme.

People with old-age or disability pensions will be given two months' advance.

4.8 By September, India could have 111 crore SARS-COV-2 cases: CDDEP

Source: thehindubusinessline.com,22 April,2020

US-based Centre for Disease, Dynamics and Economic Policy raises the number projected in earlier report

The US-based Centre for Disease, Dynamics and Economic Policy (CDDEP), has in its report dated April 20 said India's total SARS-COV-2 infections up to September could be as high as 111 crore, even with "hard lockdown, continued social distancing and isolation of cases". Even this number is the average of the expected range between 55-138 crore.

The range covers 50-150 per cent of the point estimate. "Estimates are based on latest available data but, given the novelty of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, these estimates still have some inherent uncertainty," the report says.

The report, titled SARS-COV-2 in India: Potential Impact of the Lockdown and Other Longer-Term Policies, observes that "emerging evidence suggests that asymptomatic or mild infections may account for a significant proportion infected population."

It further notes that many other countries such as China, Italy, the US, the UK and Spain showed sudden explosion in cases after a long period of few cases "indicating the possibility of many undetected cases."

Projected Total Values for Scenarios through September 2020

Baseline	Total Hospitalizations Total Hospitalizations	Peak Symptomatic Non-Hospitalized Infections	Total infections Total Infections
Baseline	1,14,11,840 (57,05,919-1,71,17,759)	19,01,97,331 (9,50,98,665-2,85,295,996)	1,26,79,82,208 (63,39,91,104-1,38,00,04,385)
Moderate lockdown Moderate Lockdown	1,10,19,226 (55,09,613-1,65,28,839)	18,36,53,775 (9,18,26,887-27,54,80,662)	1,22,43,58,499 (61,21,79,249-1,38,00,04,385)
Hard lockdown Hard Lockdown	1,10,19,192 (55,09,596-1,65,28,788)	18,36,53,200 (9,18,26,600-27,54,79,800)	1,22,43,54,668 (61,21,77,334-1,38,00,04,385)
Hard Lockdown and Continued Social Dist Hard lockdown, continued social distancing/isolation of cases ancing/Isolating Cases	1,00,53,568 (50,26,783-1,50,80,351)	16,75,59,460 (8,37,79,729-25,13,39,189)	1,11,70,63,067 (55,85,31,533-1,38,00,04,385)

It may be remembered that the same body had brought out a similar report on March 24, in which it said that India cases could be between 12-24 crore, a number that represents peak infections on one day (and hence not comparable to the 111 crore infections, which is the cumulative infections since the pandemic began in India).

The report advocates continuation of tight restrictions. "Restrictions would need to be tightened often to avoid a high peak of infections and hospitalisations," it says, noting further that "fragmented frequent changes in lockdown policy or fragmented policies (states vs states and state vs centre) can result in policy confusion and community fatigue for enforcement."

4.9 Mumbai, Pune lockdown may be extended till 18 May: State health minister

Source: livemint.com,26 April,2020

At present, the issue is only with the slums where positive cases are increasing rapidly. We have to ensure that all the containment zones are completely cordoned off, Tope said

The nationwide lockdown may be lifted on 4 May, but Mumbai and Pune are likely to extend the curbs till 18 May as covid-19 cases continue rising in the two cities, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope told Mint on Saturday.

"The main objective of implementing the lockdown was to stop the spread of covid-19 pandemic and if the spread is not getting contained, we will have to extend the lockdown," Tope said over the phone.

On 21 April, Maharashtra government reinstated a full lockdown in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region and the Pune Metropolitan Region.

"At present, the issue is only with the slums where positive cases are increasing rapidly. We have to ensure that all the containment zones are completely cordoned off. We will extend

the lockdown for 15 more days after 3 May only for the containment zones, if not for the entire Mumbai and Pune," he added.

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"At present, the issue is only with the slums where positive cases are increasing rapidly. We have to ensure that all the containment zones are completely cordoned off. We will extend the lockdown for 15 more days after 3 May only for the containment zones, if not for the entire Mumbai and Pune," he added.

There are 512 active containment zones in the state currently, while there are over 700 containment zones in Mumbai alone and Pune has sealed peth or market areas in central old Pune and Kondhwa since 7 April. This essentially means that complete lockdown will continue in all the hotspots in Pune and Mumbai, which have seen the highest number of covid-19 cases in the past month.

As of 24 April, Maharashtra reported 394 new covid-19 cases, taking the state's tally of coronavirus positive cases to 6817, according to Maharashtra health department. Of these 6,817 cases, 4,447 were from Mumbai alone, followed by 1,020 from the Pune division. In Mumbai's Dharavi, which is Asia's largest slum, the total covid-19 positive cases reached 220, as of 24 April, while 14 were dead.

"We have asked the government to enforce complete lockdown restrictions on schools, colleges and public gatherings across Maharashtra till May 18. For Mumbai and Pune, non-essential services will not be allowed to operate in the hotspot areas for at least another 15 days after 3 May," said Tope.

As per the Union government's guidance, cluster containment action plan is being implemented in places where clusters of patients have been found in the state. Currently, 1,19,161 people are in home quarantine and 8,814 people are in institutional quarantine, the state said. The death toll from covid-19 has now gone up to 301 in the state.

A month after the nationwide lockdown, the Centre allowed neighbourhood shops in the residential areas to open provided they follow certain guidelines.

The Union ministry of home affairs on Friday said, "all shops, including neighbourhood shops and standalone shops, shops in residential complexes, within the limits of municipal

corporations and municipalities, registered under the Shops and Establishment Act of the respective State and UTs" are allowed to open during the lockdown.

However, shops in market places, multi-brand and single brand malls as well as market complexes located in municipality areas will remain closed till 3 May.

The relaxations will not be applicable to coronavirus hotspots and containment zones. Shops are allowed to remain functional only with 50% of the staff. Wearing masks and social distancing were mandatory, as per the guidelines.

"While we have allowed factories and agriculture-related businesses in both green and orange zones from 20 April in the state, and are closely monitoring that social distancing be maintained in these areas," said Tope.

Among sectors that have been allowed in the green and orange zones to resume activities are agriculture and its branches (horticulture, fisheries, plantations, animal husbandry,forest-related activities), MGNREGA work, movement of cargo, functioning of commercial and private establishments, industries operating in rural areas, manufacturing in special economic zones and industrial townships only in non-containment zones, construction of roads, buildings and all kinds of industrial projects, renewable energy projects and all urgent pre-monsoon related work.

"The lockdown will have to be carefully lifted with clear segregation between hotspot and non-hotspot areas. The essential services would need to continue with the least manpower possible to reduce covid-19 transmission and social distancing norms will have to be enforced in places where non-essential services are started. After 3 May, the government can only lift the lockdown partially and only in the green and orange zones. For Mumbai and Pune, the lockdown must continue," said Dr Pradeep Awate, state surveillance officer with the Maharashtra health department.

The total number of coronavirus cases in India has climbed to 24,506. The death toll has increased to 775. India is under a lockdown till 3 May to curb the spread of the virus which has killed nearly 197,000 worldwide. Earlier this week, the Centre eased lockdown norms in places least affected by covid-19.

On 21 April, Maharashtra government reinstated a full lockdown in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and the Pune Metropolitan Region (PMR), a day after some curbs were relaxed. The development came after the state government issued guidelines on partial lifting of the lockdown from 20 April.

4.10 Covid-19: Maharashtra likely to touch 10,000 mark by April 30; state count climbs to 8,590

Source: hindustantimes.com,28 April,2020

Maharashtra took 30 days to cross 1000 cases on April 7, but going by the average number of fresh cases it is likely to reach the 10,000 mark in only 23 days. It crossed the 2,000 mark in six days on April 13. From 2000 to 4000 cases it took six days on April 19 and from 4000 to 6000 cases it took only four days (April 23).

Going by the rise in the number of new Covid-19 cases, Maharashtra is likely to touch the 10,000 mark by Thursday (April 30). The case count has already breached the 8000 mark and on Monday it mounted to 8,590 after 522 new cases were registered.

On an average, the state is getting almost 500 new cases on a daily basis since April 19. In the last nine days (since April 19), it has recorded 4,946 new cases, which indicates that there has been a steady rise in the total number, officials said.

With Covid-19 cases rising in Maharashtra, the number of patients who have recovered so far also jumped to 1,282 as 94 patients recovered on Monday.

Maharashtra took 30 days to cross 1000 cases on April 7, but going by the average number of fresh cases it is likely to reach the 10,000 mark in only 23 days. It crossed the 2,000 mark in six days on April 13. From 2000 to 4000 cases it took six days on April 19 and from 4000 to 6000 cases it took only four days (April 23).

The trend shows that Monday was also the 24th consecutive day when the number of new cases in the state was in three digits. This is the reason most of the cases - 8292 – have been registered in April alone.

On Monday, the state also completed 35 days of lockdown that was imposed on midnight of March 23, a day before the nationwide lockdown was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It was partially lifted on April 20 in areas where there are no cases or cases are minimal in number.

In Mumbai, the case count went up to 5,776 as 369 new cases registered in a day.

However, officials said that the situation is still under control as most of the new cases are from traced contacts. "We can say that the situation is under control as we are aggressively doing contact tracing and most of the new cases are those who have been traced following detection of positive Covid-19 cases," said Dr Tatyarao Lahane, director, Directorate of Medical Education and Research (DMER).

"It is true that we were expecting a decline in cases from April 21 which is not happening but the rise is also not exponential and now we will have to wait for another incubation cycle of 14 days, which is ending on May 3, before reaching any conclusion," Dr Lahane said.

The two 14-day cycles of incubation period of infection was completed on April 20. It had begun from March 22 when international traffic was stopped.

So far, the health department has conducted 1,21,562 tests at various public and private facilities across Maharashtra. Of them 1,12,552 people tested negative.

The death toll in the state also touched 369 as 27 deaths were registered on Monday. Of them, 15 are in Mumbai, six in Amravati, four in Pune and one each in Jalgaon and Aurangabad. With this, the death toll in Mumbai also increased to 219.

Of the 27 deaths, 22 patients had co-morbidity conditions. Of them, one was affected with HIV and another was suffering with cancer, said health officials.

The mortality rate of the state has significantly dropped to 4.24% (342 deaths till Sunday) from 7.41% (148 cases) on April 13. However, it continues to be higher than the national mortality rate of 3.13% till Sunday, states the data of the state medical education department.

As Covid-19 cases are rising, the number of patients who have recovered so far also jumped to 1,282 as 94 positive patients recovered on Monday.

State health minister Rajesh Tope said that the state is prepared for any situation. "We have set up 1677 Covid-19 dedicated hospitals where 1,76,357 isolated beds and 7,248 ICU beds are available. These hospitals are divided into three categories between asymptotic, mild and serious cases. We have around 3000 ventilators, around 80,000 personal protective equipment (PPE) kits and 2.82 lakh N95 masks," he said.

Maharashtra, currently, has 572 active containment zones. Around 7,861 survey teams comprising doctors and assisting staff have screened more than 32.28 lakh people for the coronavirus infection.

It has also kept 9399 suspected patients at government quarantine facilities while 1,45,677 are home quarantined, state health officials said.

Meanwhile, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar on Monday appointed four IAS officers - Anil Kawade, cooperation commissioner, Saurabh Rao, sugar commissioner, Sachindra Pratap Singh, animal husbandry commissioner and Kaustubh Diwegaonkar, director, Ground Water Survey and Development Agency (GSDA), who will help in planning preventive measures and their implementation to contain the coronavirus cases in Pune, where 1027 cases have been registered so far.

The state government has also allocated a sum of Rs 1275.25 crore to distribute among the poor, weak, deprived, widows and handicapped section of society who are beneficiaries under many government welfare schemes. The beneficiaries will get advance pay of three months considering lockdown restrictions which led to loss of income. Rs 130 crore has been received from the Centre whereas the rest of the amount will be paid from the state exchequer, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar said.

4.11 India coronavirus, COVID-19 updates, April 29: 125 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours in Delhi, total count jumps to 3,439

Source: zeenews.india.com,30 April,2020

As India continues its fight against coronavirus COVID-19, the total number of cases reported is 31,332 which includes 7,696 cured cases and 1,0007 deaths. As many as 1,897 new cases and 73 deaths have been reported in the last 24 hours which is the highest single day death toll, as per the Union Health ministry data on Wednesday morning.

As India continues its fight against coronavirus COVID-19, the total number of cases reported is 31,332 which includes 7,696 cured cases and 1,0007 deaths. As many as 1,897 new cases and 73 deaths have been reported in the last 24 hours which is the highest single day death toll, as per the Union Health ministry data on Wednesday morning.

Maharashtra continues to be the hit-worst hit state as the number of active cases crossed 8,500-mark, while Gujarat's total cases were recorded at 3,548.

The official death toll from the coronavirus has crossed 2.1 lakh worldwide, with more than 31 lakh infections recorded, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University at 6.30am on Wednesday (April 29,2020) morning.

While US and Spain continue to report the most number of infections, Italy has the highest number of COVID-19 fatalities at 27, 359 followed by Spain at 23,822.

MAY 2020

5.1 Covid-19: Lockdown extended by two weeks with effect from 4 May, says MHA

Source: livemint.com,1 May,2020

UP Police check authority passes of commuters at Delhi-Noida border

- Movement of individuals in all zones, for all non-essential activities, shall remain strictly prohibited between 7 pm to 7 am, MHA said

- The guidelines have permitted considerable relaxations to the Orange and Green zones, MHA said in a statement

Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 to further extend the lockdown for a period of two weeks beyond 4 May, 2020 in order to combat the novel coronavirus outbreak in the country.

MHA has also issued new guidelines to regulate different activities in this period based on risk profiling of the districts of the country into Red (hotspot), Green and Orange zones.

The home ministry added, "A large number of other activities are allowed in the Red Zones. All industrial and construction activities in rural areas, including MNREGA works, food-processing units and brick-kilns are permitted."

Moreover, the guidelines have permitted considerable relaxations to the Orange and Green zones, MHA said in a statement.

In Orange Zones, inter-district movement of individuals and vehicles will be allowed for permitted activities only. Four-wheelers will have a maximum of 2 passengers besides the driver and pillion riding will be allowed on two-wheelers, stated MHA.

The latest guidelines expolained the restrictions. "These include travel by air, rail, metro and inter-State movement by road, running of schools, colleges, and other educational and training and coaching institutions; hospitality services, including hotels and restaurants; places of large public gatherings, such as cinema halls, malls, gymnasiums, sports complexes, social, political, cultural and other kinds of gatherings; and, religious places and places of worship for public," the home ministry stated.

Additionally, in Orange Zones, along with the activities permitted in Red Zone, taxis and cab aggregators will be permitted with one driver and two passengers.

The MHA also clarified that a limited number of activities will remain prohibited across India, irrespective of the zone, including travel by air, rail, metro and inter-State movement by road as well as running of schools, colleges, other educational and training/coaching centres.

In addition to that, movement of individuals in all zones, for all non-essential activities, shall remain strictly prohibited between 7 pm to 7 am, the MHA stated.

On 30 April, 2020, the Union Health Ministry had spelled out all major metropolitan cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Ahmedabad—as red zones after the lockdown ends on May 3, and asked states and local bodies to demarcate containment areas and buffer zones for strict monitoring of movement.

Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have the highest number of red zones at 19 and 14 respectively, followed by Tamil Nadu at 12 and all of Delhi's 11 districts marked as red zones.

The classification of the red, green and orange zones will be shared by health ministry with the State and Union Territories on a weekly basis or earlier as required, the MHA added.

5.2 Coronavirus India lockdown Day 41 live updates | Return of Indian nationals from abroad in phased manner from May 7

Source: thehindu.com,4 May,2020

Migrant workers, most of them from U.P. Bihar walk to their native towns and villages, near Shahpur in Thane district, on Monday, May 4, 2020

Globally, as of May 3, there have been 33,56,205 confirmed cases, including 2,38,730 deaths, reported to WHO

The total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in India crossed 40,000 on Sunday, making it one among 16 countries that have crossed that figure.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in its May 4 update said that 43,437 have been tested positive and the death toll stands at 1,398.

The lockdown, imposed first on March 24 was to end on May 3. However, it was extended by another two weeks by the MHA.

In an interview to PTI, NITI Aayog Member, V.K. Paul said extending India's lockdown was part of a plan to curb infection transmission. "...Real goal of lockdown was to suppress the chain of transmission of the virus. So, we will lose that, if we abruptly end it," Dr. Paul said.

5.3 Coronavirus Outbreak Updates: Confirmed cases in Bihar rise to 535 as 7 more test positive; Munger worst-affected district with 102 infections

Source: firstpost.com,6 May,2020

Coronavirus Outbreak Updates:Seven persons, including four minors, tested positive for COVID 19 on Tuesday, taking the total number of cases in Bihar to 535, a top official said.

Tripura chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb said that 13 personnel of BSF's 138th Battalion, including a mess worker, had tested positive for the coronavirus pushing the total number of cases in the state to 42.

Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekhar Rao said that lockdown in the state has been extended till 29 May. He advised people to finish their purchases by 6 pm as there would be a curfew from 7 pm. The chief minister warned of strict action against those found outside their homes after 7 pm.

Noting that the opening of shops in Mumbai has led to the flouting of social distancing norms amid rising number on COVID-19 cases, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation Commissioner Praveen Pardeshi ordered that no permission be given to non-essential shops, including liquor stores, in Mumbai.

The total number of coronavirus infections in Delhi rose to 5,104 as 206 news cases were reported today. The toll stands at 64 with no deaths being reported today.

Mumbai reports 635 new COVID-19 cases and 26 deaths, pushing the total case count to 9,758 and fatalities to 387, PTI quotes the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation as saying.

The Tamil Nadu health department said that 508 new coronavirus cases have been reported in the state on Tuesday, taking the total number of cases to 4,058. Two deaths have been reported too, taking the toll to 33.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issues standard operating procedures for movement of Indian nationals stranded outside the country.

"Passengers found to be symptomatic shall be immediately taken to medical facility. Remaining passengers shall be taken to suitable institutional quarantine facilities to be arranged by respective states. These passengers shall be kept under institutional quarantine for 14 days.

"If they test negative after 14 days, they will be allowed to go home and will undertake self-monitoring of their health for 14 more days as per protocol. The remaining people will be shifted to medical facility by states/UTs governments," the statement said.

All existing visas granted to foreigners, except certain categories, to remain suspended till the prohibition on international air travel of passengers from/to India is lifted by GoI, the MHA said.

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and said that "it would be dangerous to fly back stranded Indians from abroad without proper coronavirus testing."

"From 7 May, 2,250 people from abroad will be returning back to Kerala initially. The Centre is learned to have approved to bring back 80,000 expatriates but there are 1.69 lakh people in Kerala's priority list. This has been taken up with Centre," he added.

The Ministry of Railways on Tuesday said that so far, 67 'Shramik Special Trains' have been run by various Zonal Railways.

"Till 4 May, we had run 55 trains. Today, trains have been operated from Bengaluru, Surat, Sabarmati, Jalandhar, Kota, Ernakulam, 21 more such trains may leave today," the statement said.

Union health ministry joint secretary Lav Aggarwal said that the coronavirus toll in India rose by 195 in the last 24 hours, adding that the total number of cases of stands at 46,433 nationwide.

In the 4 pm press briefing, he said, "In last 24 hours there have been 3,900 new cases, 195 deaths and 1,020 people have recovered. The recovery rate is 27.41 percent."

Forty five Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel have tested positive for the novel coronavirus so far. Among the 45, 43 of them were deployed for IS duties in Delhi and two of them in the Law and Order duty with Delhi Police, said the ITBP.

Two infants among eight who tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Pimpri Chinchwad on Tuesday, ANI quoted the health department as saying.

As many as, 71 fresh COVID-19 cases were reported in Pune on Monday, taking the total number of confirmed cases in the district to 2,122.

Putting a close to the uncertainly over engineering and medical exams, the government on Tuesday announced dates for holding of Joint Entrance Exams (JEE) and National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET).

While interacting with students in a webinar, HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal said the JEE-Mains exams will be held from 18-23 July while, JEE-Advanced exams will be held in August. He also said that the medical entrance exam NEET will be conducted on 26 July.

With eight more people testing positive for the novel coronavirus in Karnataka between Monday 5 pm to Tuesday 12 pm, the total number of confirmed cases in the state climbed to 659.

So far, the state has recorded 28 deaths, according to the health department. The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state stood at 49.2 percent after 324 patients were discharged.

The fourth floor of the Shastri Bhawan, office of Department of Legal Affairs, was sealed on Tuesday after a senior law ministry official tested positive for the novel coronavirus .

The senior official in the department of legal affairs who is now positive had last attended office on 23 April.

According to a journalist with The Indian Express, gate number 1 and 2 which were often used by the officer have been closed, along with the corresponding lifts, for disinfecting and will remain shut till Wednesday (6 May).

67 new COVID-19 positive cases reported in Andhra Pradesh in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of cases in the state to 1717 with the state toll at 34, according to the state health department on Tuesday. Meanwhile, state-run TASMAC alcohol shops will not be opening in the Greater Chennai City police limits on 7 May, the Tamil Nadu government has said.

COVID-19 cases in border guarding force BSF have climbed to 67, with the maximum reported in a Delhi battalion, deployed in the Jamia area for law and order duties, and from the frontier state of Tripura, officials said on Tuesday.

A special train carrying about 1,200 migrant workers left for Khagaria in Bihar from Ghatkesar near Hyderabad on Tuesday.

"The Shramik Special Train left for Khagaria in Bihar on Tuesday morning. All the passengers were screened before they were allowed to board," a senior south central railway official said.

This is the second train arranged for the workers in Telangana. Similarly, another train from Rayannapadu near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh left for Chandrapur in Maharashtra, the SCR official added.

India registered 46,433 COVID-19 positive cases on Tuesday with 1,568 fatalities due to the viral disease, according to the latest data released by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The figure includes 32,134 active cases.

After the Delhi government raised the VAT on auto fuel, the petrol price per litre is hiked by Rs 1.67 to Rs 71.26 while, the price of diesel increased by Rs 7.10 to Rs 69.39 in the National Capital on Tuesday.

Aadhaar-based claims for public distribution system (PDS) would have saved a lot of misery for the poor, said Abhijit Banerjee during discussion on economic impact with Congress' Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday.

He further claimed that many names still missing in the system.

"We should try to be optimistic about overall economic revival in India post-lockdown," said Banerjee.

Abhijit Banerjee advised that India should take a cue from the United States and insisted on putting money into people's hands, "as the current US administration is doing".

"We have to take a chance on widening the reach of PDS," Banerjee told Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday while discussing the state of Indian economy.

Handing out temporary ration card to anybody who requires one at the current moment would be a good idea to tackle the food crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, said Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee to Rahul Gandhi.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's dialogue with Nobel Laureate Abhijit Banerjee on dealing with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis will be aired on Tuesday as part of his series of deliberations with experts on economy and health.

The Congress party has tweeted a 1.44-minute clip from the conversation which will be aired in full at 9 am Tuesday.

In an order released on Monday, the Mumbai Police stated that Section 144 has been imposed in the city till 17 May between 8 pm and 7 am. The order clarified that during those hours, only vehicles addressing medical services and the ones used for essential services will be allowed to ply.

From Tuesday, stand-alone shops will issue tokens for customers to avoid crowding at shop counters.

Even as India's COVID-19 fight entered its third phase on Monday with considerable relaxations to the lockdown curbs, confirmed cases surged to 42,836 with 2,573 fresh cases. The death toll rose to 1,389 with 83 fatalities reported in 24 hours.

The government said a record high number of 1,074 patients recovered from the infection in the last 24 hours but cautioned that the restrictions can be reimposed if there is any complacency in following the containment and social distancing norms.

The Centre also announced that it will facilitate the return of Indians stranded in other countries in a phased manner from 7 May.

Country records highest number of recoveries in 24 hours, says health ministry

Confirmed cases in Bihar rise to 535 as 7 more test positive Munger worstaffected district with 102 infections" Confirmed cases in India rose to 42,836.

According to the 5 pm update issued by the Union health ministry, India now has 42, 836 confirmed cases of coronavirus while 1,380 persons have died due to the disease.

Maharashtra has reported the highest number of cases (12,974), followed by Gujarat (5, 428 cases), Delhi (4,549) cases, Tamil Nadu (3,023 cases) and Madhya Pradesh (2942).

Maharashtra also recorded the highest number of fatalities with 548 deaths followed by 290 in Gujarat and 165 in Madhya Pradesh.

According to the health ministry, the number of active cases stood at 29,685 as 11,761 persons were cured/discharged while one has migrated.

Earlier, while addressing a press briefing, Joint Secretary at the health ministry Lav Agarwal said that as many as 1,074 COVID-19 patients have recovered in the last 24 hours, the highest number of recoveries recorded in one day.

The rate of recovery stands at 27.52 percent , he said, but stressed that there is a need for rigorous implementation of the containment strategy while people also need to strictly adhere to hygiene as well as social distancing habits.

Agarwal cautioned that if the virus spread is detected in areas that do not have any active cases for now, restrictions can be reimposed there.

Kerala did not report a single new case for the second consecutive day, but neighbouring Tamil Nadu saw its tally rising by a record number of 527 new cases. Gujarat and Maharashtra also reported significant rise in their numbers. Several other states including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha also reported a rising number of cases.

Gujarat reported 376 new cases and 29 more deaths — the highest for a day — to take its total tally of confirmed cases to more than 5,800 and fatalities to 319. Ahmedabad alone reported 259 new cases and a record number of 26 deaths on Monday, taking its tally of confirmed cases to above 4,000 and the death toll to 234.

In Maharashtra's Mumbai, the case count crossed the 9,000-mark and jumped to 9,123 with the addition of 510 new patients, while 18 more died due to the viral infection.

While several big urban centres across the country continued to report rise in the number of cases, several smaller states and Union Territories — including Goa, Puducherry, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Meghalaya, Assam, Aruranchal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Manipur, Mizoram, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Tripura — have witnessed nil or very few cases getting detected in the last few days.

Confusion prevails as restrictions are eased in green, orange zones

In the third phase of the lockdown, more categories of stores including of apparel and electrical goods, as also various kinds of repair centres, and even barber shops in some places, reopened in several parts of the country. Liquor shops saw the biggest of the

crowds and had to be closed at many places, including in the National Capital, after social distancing norms appeared totally missing.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said whatever happened on Monday was not right and all have to follow the social distancing norms . "It is sad that people were not following social distancing norms at some shops today. I request everyone to not take any risk," he said.

On the other hand, confusion prevailed in large industrial and business clusters across the country, including in Noida and Gurgaon on the outskirts of Delhi, on reopening of offices and industrial establishments due to lack of clarity on daily commute of their staff given continuing restrictions on major modes of the public transport.

Row over rail fares of migrant workers

The transport of migrant workers back to their home states continued for the third consecutive day on Monday. Kerala opened its borders at six places for Keralites stranded in other states due to the COVID-19 lockdown to return to their native places.

Confirmed cases in Bihar rise to 535 as 7 more test positive Munger worstaffected district with 102 infections" width="380" height="285"

Migrants stand in long queues in Hyderabad as police personnel collect their personal details before sending them via trains to their native places. PTI

A total of 21,500 migrant workers and their family members stranded in Gujarat for over 40 days were sent back to their native states, including UP and Bihar, through 18 trains in the last three days, a senior official told PTI.

Union health ministry officials also said the process of transporting stranded migrant labourers was being coordinated by states, though the central government guidelines have clearly stated that the infectious disease management requires everyone to stay where he or she is.

"Based on the request given from states for particular cases, permission was given to run special trains. Be it the government of India or the Railways, we have not talked about charging from workers. Eighty-five per cent of the transportation cost is borne by the Railways, while states have to bear 15 percent of the cost," Agarwal told reporters.

Earlier in the day, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi lashed out at the Centre and said the party's state units will bear the cost of rail travel of needy migrant workers and labourers stranded at their workplaces due to the lockdown imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus .

"What is particularly disturbing is that the central government and the Rail Ministry are charging them (migrant workers) for train tickets in this hour of crisis," she said. "When the government can spend nearly Rs 100 crores on transport and food for just one public programme in Gujarat, when the Rail Ministry has the largesse to donate Rs 151 Crores to the PM's Corona fund, then why can't these essential members of our nation's fabric be given a fraction of the same courtesy, especially free rail travel, at this hour of acute distress?," the Congress president asked.

Centre to facilitate return of Indians stranded abroad

Separately, the Union Home Ministry said the government will facilitate the return of Indians stranded abroad and the process will begin from 7 May in a phased manner. Only asymptomatic people would be allowed to travel and it would be arranged by aircraft and naval ships, and the facility will be available on a payment basis.

After their arrival in India, medical examinations will be conducted on everyone and they will be subsequently put under quarantine for 14 days, either in a hospital or in an institutional facility, the ministry said.

Modi calls for new template of globalisation at NAM virtual conference

At a video-conference of leaders of the Non- Aligned Movement (NAM), Prime Minsiter Narendra Modi called for a new template of globalisation post COVID-19 , saying humanity is facing a major crisis.

" COVID-19 has shown us the limitations of the existing international system. In the post-COVID world, we need a new template of globalization, based on fairness, equality, and humanity," the prime minister said. "We need international institutions that are more representative of today's world. We need to promote human welfare, and not focus on economic growth alone. India has long championed such initiatives," he said.

5.4 Covid-19: Indian Railways to restart limited train services from May 12

Source: scroll.in,10 May,2020

Union Railway Minister Piyush Goyal on Sunday said in a tweet that Indian Railways plans to gradually restart train services for passengers from May 12, with 15 pairs of special trains initially connecting New Delhi with other cities in India.

Rajdhani Express

Train services for passengers have remained suspended since a nationwide lockdown was imposed to combat the coronavirus in March. The lockdown, extended twice, is scheduled to end on May 17.

"These trains will be run as special trains from New Delhi Station connecting Dibrugarh, Agartala, Howrah, Patna, Bilaspur, Ranchi, Bhubaneswar, Secunderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Madgaon, Mumbai Central, Ahmedabad and Jammu Tawi," a government press release said.

The bookings can be done from 4 pm on Monday only through the website of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, the order said. Ticket booking counters at railway stations shall remain closed.

The government added that all passengers will have to wear face masks, and will be screened for coronavirus symptoms. Only asymptomatic passengers will be allowed to board the trains. "Further details including train schedule will be issued separately in due course," the order said.

More special services will be started on new routes after May 12, the press release added. These special services will be based on the available coaches after reserving 20,000 coaches for coronavirus care centres, the government said. Consideration will also be provided to the 300 Shramik Special trains to run every day to ferry stranded migrant labourers to their hometowns.

Shramik Special trains

Goyal said earlier on Sunday that the Railways is geared up to run up to 300 "Shramik Special" trains per day to take migrants from their place of work to their hometowns, over the last six days. He added that the Railways had so far run 366 Shramik Special trains with over 3,60,000 migrant workers. Goyal said 287 trains have already reached their destinations, while 79 are in transit.

"I appeal to all the states to give permission to evacuate and bring back their stranded migrants so that we can get all of them back to their homes in the next 3-4 days itself," the railway minister said in another tweet.

The Centre had on April 29 first announced that "Shramik Special" trains would be started to ferry migrant workers back home.

5.5 Telangana Latest News, May 16, 2020: More Relaxations From Today as Active COVID-19 Cases Restricted to 4 Zones in Hyderabad

Source: india.com,16 May,2020

New Delhi: Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao on Friday said that there was no active COVID-19 case in the state except for four zones in capital Hyderabad, even as the state's overall COVID-19 count inched closer to crossing the 1,500-mark. Also Read - Green Zones Will Completely Reopen in Lockdown 4.0, Except Malls, Cinema Halls | Punjab, Bengal, Maharashtra, Telangana Want Extension

In a statement, the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said, "Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao has declared that except in four zones in Hyderabad, there are no coronavirus active cases in the state." Also Read - COVID-19: Hyderabad Woman Delivers Baby While Suffering From Coronavirus, Term it as Telangana Doctors' Major Achievement

Separately, the state Health Department said, "40 new COVID-19 positive cases have been reported in Telangana today, taking the total number of positive cases to 1454. Total active cases stand at 461."

Notably, the four areas in Hyderabad which together have these combined 461 active cases are LB Nagar, Malakpet, Charminar and Karawan.

With active cases in the state restricted only to the said zones, the Chief Minister on Friday announced more relaxations, which will come into effect from today. Starting today, shops

selling air conditioners, automobile spare parts and automobile showrooms will be allowed to open all over the state, including Hyderabad.

On post May 17 scenario, he said that the state would examine the Centre's guidelines, review the situation and finalise the future course of strategy and implement the guidelines.

In an address to the nation on Tuesday night, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the extension of the lockdown; the lockdown has already been increased twice, which includes its current ongoing third phase, which will end on Sunday.

Earlier this month, the Telangana government had, however, already extended the lockdown in the state till May 29.

5.6 As India's lockdown ends, a mental health crisis is just beginning

Source: weforum.org,18 May,2020

Passengers queuing for a train in New Delhi after lockdown restrictions were eased, May 2020

- Cases of mental illness have risen by 20% in India since the country went into lockdown.

- Only through local, community-based responses will India find the capacity to cope with this unfolding crisis.

- Here are three evidence-based approaches that can unlock the power of communities in this fight.

India witnessed the largest containment experiment in history, when - on 25 March - its 1.3 billion citizens battened down their hatches in an attempt to flatten the COVID-19 curve. The lockdown may now be ending but - as is happening across the globe - a new epidemic is now emerging. According to a survey conducted by the Indian Psychiatry Society, within a week of the start of the lockdown, the number of reported cases of mental illness in India had risen by 20%.

In the weeks and months ahead, India will suffer from a massive mental health crisis due to unemployment, alcohol abuse, economic hardship, domestic violence and indebtedness. While this will affect most of the population it will disproportionately affect the poor, most vulnerable and marginalized groups.

"At-risk populations include the 150 million with pre-existing mental health issues, Covid-19 survivors, frontline medical workers, young people, differently abled people, women, workers in the unorganized sector, and the elderly," says Nelson Vinod Moses, a leading suicide prevention advocate in India.

When we launched a volunteer mental health support helpline – Let's Talk – in early April, we knew we needed as many resources as possible to support existing efforts led by state governments and other civil society organizations. Based on our experience fielding calls from people in distress, we believe India's already overburdened mental health machinery will be unable to handle this unfolding situation, and will need to leverage the power of communities with locally devised, evidence-based solutions. Here are three:

1. Destigmatization: COVID-19 has created a great deal of stigma mainly through a lack of awareness about how the disease spreads and how it attacks the human body. In many cities, healthcare workers, who are treating COVID-19 patients during the day, have been forcefully evicted from their homes out of fear that they may be bringing the virus back at night. People who tested positive are being shunned in apartment complexes by their resident associations.

The entire social distancing narrative has to be rebuilt. It's encouraging to see how some early COVID-19 survivors turned to social media to share their experiences in order to build confidence amongst others. Maybe there is an opportunity to train the more than 19,000 Indians who have now recovered, and to turn them into COVID-19 champions – equipping them to serve as buddies for people who are now feared to be positive or are under suspicion. These champions, having experienced the stress first-hand and having recovered, are the right people to lead this change.

The Size of Coronavirus Lockdowns

Number of people placed on enforced lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, per country (in million people)

■ Ongoing ■ At height of outbreak

Country	Value
India	1,380
China	760
United States*	297
Bangladesh	165
Russia	142
Philippines	100
UK*	68
France	65
Italy	60
South Africa	59
Colombia	51
Spain	47
Argentina	45
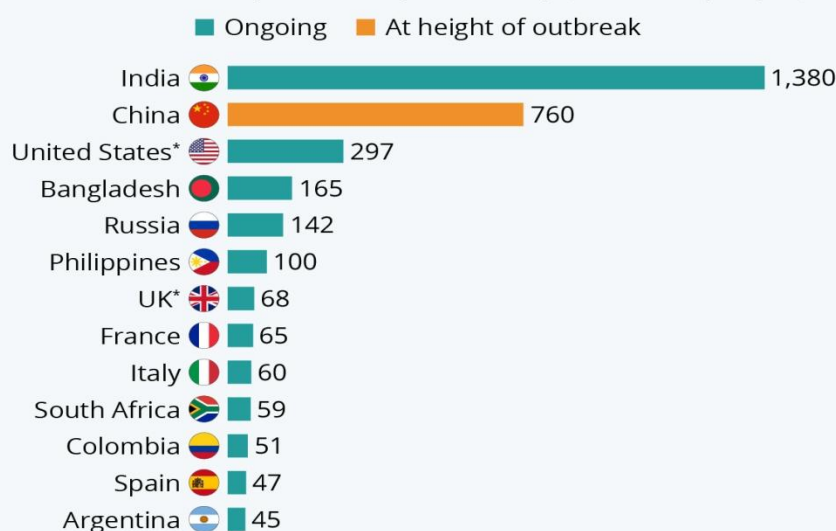
* At least partly enforced
Source: Media reports

statista ◢

2. Community infrastructure for support: Even with a team of more than 300 volunteers at Let's Talk, we are acutely aware that it is impossible for us to provide long-term support to the community. Neither can India's formal mental health system, which has a limited number of specialists; 9,000 psychiatrists for 1.3 billion people. Shekar Saxena, former firector of the WHO's Mental Health Division, has said: "Mental health systems have always been very scanty in India and during this time, the gap between what is needed and what is available has widened markedly."

The real need is to build community-based capacity in order to handle local issues long after the acute phase of the epidemic. A small team of peer counslelors working under a local administrator and trained on established models - such as Dr. Vikram Patel's Sangath or the Atmiyata model by Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy (CMHLP) - might be the way forward. This will require a close partnership between civil society, local administration, and a standardized training and technology backbone, if it is to deliver consistent quality support. Local anchors will build accountability and ownership, and contextualize it for their own surroundings. Unless the community is empowered to take care of itself, we are staring at an ever-growing shadow of mental distress which will last much longer than the pandemic.

3. Building resilience amongst adolescents and young children. With schools closed for the past eight weeks, 253 million adolescents in India are in limbo, stuck with families unsure about their financial future, a lack of personal space, and most importantly separated from their friends. They are exposed to widespread fear fuelled by the rapid spread of the virus,

compounded by constant news chatter about death and disease which creates uncertainty and apprehension about their loved ones. Many of the community support systems outside of the families have become unavailable, particularly for young girls, and domestic violence is on the rise. For an entire generation to grow up in these conditions, with no clear answers for the foreseeable future, is unprecedented and will have a significant impact on their worldview. For adolescents, it is reset time. It is time to build mental wellbeing and resilience into schools, the community, and their families. We need a systemic approach to build the demand for mental wellbeing, just as we broadly introduced sports into schools in the late 1990s. The Indian government's Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (National Adolescent Health) programme has been reconfigured to go beyond its initial remit of sexual and reproductive health. Since February this year, the programme's focus has been updated to include outreach by counsellors, facility-based counselling, social and behavioural change.

While we try to manage the urgent task at hand – containing the virus – the long-term wellbeing of adolescents might fall by the wayside. But to let it do so would be a devastating mistake. As UNICEF has put it: "The stakes could not be higher. If not adequately or appropriately addressed, the mental health consequences for a generation of children and young people could far surpass the immediate health and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving long-term social and economic consequences in its wake."

5.7 Coronavirus: Why a vaccine is still far away

Source: indianexpress.com,20 May,2020

A volunteer at trials, led by the University of Oxford, on the newly announced vaccine candidate against Covid-19.

For Covid-19, there are over 100 vaccines being developed across the world now, some from scratch, some from existing molecules developed for other diseases.

Every time there has been news about a potential new vaccine against Covid-19, hopes have risen around the world. But some have also taken a realistic approach. Such as British PM Boris Johnson, a Covid-19 survivor himself, who has written in The Mail: "There remains a very long way to go, and I must be frank that a vaccine might not come to fruition…We need to find new ways to control the virus."

A series of stages

Development of a vaccine is a long process that can falter at any step. There is also the issue of effectiveness — how the vaccine performs in real-life conditions against efficacy, which is performance in ideal conditions during trials.

Once a candidate is identified, its safety and efficacy have to be tested over three phases, as per protocols. A fourth stage involves collection and analysis of post-marketing data.

For Covid-19, there are over 100 vaccines being developed across the world now, some from scratch, some from existing molecules developed for other diseases.

Oxford University

Last month, the University of Oxford announced it is ready to trial its vaccine candidate, ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, developed from the common cold virus whose safety in humans is already established. "ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 is made from a virus (ChAdOx1), which is a weakened version of a common cold virus (adenovirus) that causes infections in chimpanzees, that has been genetically changed so that it is impossible for it to grow in humans. Genetic material has been added to the ChAdOx1 construct, that is used to make proteins from the COVID-19 virus (SARS-CoV-2) called Spike glycoprotein (S)," the University announced last month. This protein is found on the surface of SARS-CoV-2.

Last week, a paper, not yet peer-reviewed, gave out the results of the vaccine trial in macaques: "We observed a significantly reduced viral load in bronchoalveolar lavage fluid and respiratory tract tissue of vaccinated animals challenged with SARS-CoV-2 compared with control animals, and no pneumonia was observed in vaccinated rhesus macaques." In other words, the vaccine did not prevent infection but it did prevent pneumonia.

CanSino Biologics

Hong Kong-listed firm CanSino Biologics is testing a vaccine. It announced last week that Phase 1 trials have been cleared and the vaccine is moving into Phase 2 "based on the preliminary safety data of the Phase I clinical trial". The results of that trial have not been made public. This too is an adenovirus-based vaccine. The double-blind, placebo-controlled

study in 500 healthy patients will be done in association with researchers from the Academy of Military Medical Sciences' Institute of Biotechnology.

The National Research Council of Canada has said it would work with the company for development of its vaccine, Ad5-nCoV, in Canada.

Another company, Sinovac, backed by the Chinese government, is working on a vaccine, and plans to produce 100 million shots a year, news reports said.

Imperial College London

The UK government is funding a vaccine effort at Imperial College London. Professor Robin Shattock, Head of Mucosal Infection and Immunity in the UK Department of Medicine, and his team developed the vaccine within 14 days of getting the gene sequence of the virus from China. It is not being tested in animals. The researchers plan to move to human trials soon and Professor Shattock has been quoted as saying that the vaccine could be available some time next year.

Inovio Pharmaceuticals

US-based Inovio Pharmaceuticals is working on a DNA vaccine candidate, INO-4800, and has got a grant from the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. In April it started Phase 1 clinical trials. It showed encouraging response in animal studies, the company has claimed.

5.8 Immunity passport for jobs, marriage, travel: Will this be our post-Covid-19 world?

Source: indiatoday.in,22 May,2020

Many countries invariably want only those with immunity against Covid-19 to travel or work in public. Immunity passports are taking roots in one form or the other in countries from China to Germany. Read here how it may change post-coronavirus world

The novel coronavirus and Covid-19, the disease caused by it, are here to stay perhaps forever. There is no medicine to treat the disease at this point of time. A vaccine against the virus is in the process of trial. The world has its fingers crossed.

But governments have to function and find a way to keep economies running. This is what sustains the livelihood of people, whose life is at risk due to the raging novel coronavirus.

Security personnel at Amritsar airport checking passports of passengers flying out of India in special arrangement during coronavirus lockdown on April 27

The Covid-19 outbreak has posed a difficult choice between life and livelihood. Until now, governments world over chose to protect life over livelihood by imposing lockdowns. Now, the focus is shifting to livelihood with the hope that hospitals save the lives at risk.

But how do we go about livelihood sustaining economy that includes jobs and travel. Who should travel? Who can be allowed to work in public? The touchstone test here is to find out who poses the least danger of spreading the infection and who is least vulnerable.

This brings the governments to the idea of an 'immunity passport', of some kind. Conversation around immunity passports got serious in the latter half of April, when the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned against the idea.

Still, some countries have actually gone ahead with the idea. China launched this "immunity passport" in February on an experimental basis with the help of tech giant Alibaba. By April, it had been implemented in most parts of China as the country lifted its lockdown.

To travel in China, one needs to have a favourable health code - a colour scheme. People have to fill in their personal information including name, phone number, passport number or national identity number, share health-related information, travel history, known contact with a coronavirus positive person and the like.

Did you start thinking about Aarogya Setu app? China actually inspired governments in many countries with this model of contact tracing.

But in China, it is move invasive as the country's app also requires passport or national identity details like India's Aadhaar. Authorities verify the information and each user in China gets a QR code in red, amber or green. Only the greens are allowed to travel freely. Quarantine for the rest.

India too has allowed travel for only those who have Aarogya Setu app installed in their phones showing green band declaring the person safe. However, this is purely based on self-declaration. In the absence of Aarogya Setu app, a self-declaration form also works in India.

The US, the UK, Germany, Japan, Russia and many other countries are considering or adopting this model of public movement. The South American country Chile is in fact issuing certificates to those who have recovered from Covid-19. The certificate is valid for three months. These people are allowed to travel freely and work at public places.

What is the problem with this kind of immunity passport?

To understand this let's consider an episode from history as quoted by the journal Nature. A similar immunity passport arrangement had been made in Louisiana in the US in the 19th century following an outbreak of yellow fever.

[Yellow fever is a viral disease transmitted through mosquito bite. It is mostly mild with symptoms like fever, headache, vomiting, fatigue and jaundice. Some patients may have fatal heart, liver and kidney conditions. No specific treatment for the disease exists. Treatment is focused on symptoms and limiting complications. But a vaccine is there.]

The scare that yellow fever caused in this American state was such that people were divided into two categories based on their exposure to the yellow fever virus: acclimated and un-acclimated.

Acclimated were those who had survived yellow fever and un-acclimated were those who somehow managed to protect them from the virus. What followed was bizarre. Immunity or lack of it dictated who could marry, who and where they could work, and, also how much a slave was worth.

"Presumed immunity concentrated political and economic power in the hands of the wealthy elite, and was weaponised to justify white supremacy," Nature records. Now consider a post-coronavirus world. An immunity passport to travel within and outside the city, state or country?An immunity passport to work in public?Employers asking for immunity passport during interviews?Immunity passport for marriage, for invitation to

social gatherings, for a beer party with friends, to enter a discotheque, to enter a shopping mall or to go to college? Some agencies in India have already toyed with the idea. In April, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai said it was checking how many BEST (public bus transport in Mumbai) drivers, conductors and healthcare workers had been exposed to coronavirus and got immunity against Covid-19.

This puts some people at greater economic risk if they have managed to keep themselves safe since the coronavirus outbreak. A large number of them have already suffered due to coronavirus lockdown. Many have lost jobs and now if they don't have immunity for coronavirus, they may not get employed for being vulnerable to Covid-19. There is an additional problem. That there is only limited data to support the theory that a cured person has better immunity against novel coronavirus than a non-Covid-19 person.

But employers may be tempted to reduce their presumptive person-days of work by recruiting somebody with immunity passport. The employers from various industries in India have been clamouring for greater freedom in recruitment and management of workers. Recent changes in labour laws by many states are an attempt in that direction. Immunity passport in job market could be another major setback for the workforce. It is feared that with immunity passport gaining currency in some form or the other in countries may lead to a new kind of apartheid in post-Covid-19 world.

5.9 74% of India's Covid-19 cases reported in May

Source: hindustantimes.com ,23 May,2020

By Saturday evening, Maharashtra which is the worst hit state, recorded 2,608 new Covid-19 cases to take the state's tally to 47,190.

India's Covid-19 cases rose 11 per cent over the past two days to 125,101, according to Saturday morning's data from the ministry of health and family welfare (MoHFW).

Between Monday morning and Saturday morning the number of cases has gone up by 30 per cent. This is also in line with the rate of growth when compared to the previous five days.

By Saturday evening, Maharashtra which is the worst hit state, recorded 2,608 new Covid-19 cases to take the state's tally to 47,190. Mumbai accounts for 28,817 of those cases. Maharasntra's death toll now stands at 1,577.

The number of Covid-19 infections and fatalities in the country has risen rapidly this month at a rate faster than in other countries that have been hit badly by the virus. Other than Maharashtra, the states of Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Assam have reported a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases this month.

Although India reported its first case on January 30, around 74% of India's total cases have been reported in May alone.

5.10 Schools from green, orange zones likely to reopen first, students of classes 8-12 to attend

Source: theprint.in,25 May,2020

The HRD ministry will announce guidelines for schools to follow after discussions with other ministries, and will include a teachers' training module.

Students wearing masks in a classroom

New Delhi: As a part of its plan for reopening schools, the central government intends to do so zone-wise after the lockdown is lifted, ThePrint has learnt. During this time, only students from classes 8 to 12 will be called in while students in primary and pre-primary classes will return after all schools fully reopen, NCERT has suggested in its draft guidelines.

ThePrint had earlier reported that the government was considering allowing only 30 per cent students at a time in school as it explored options to reopen the educational institutions. It has now further been decided that in order to make sure that the younger children are not at a risk of infection, only older children will be called in.

Confirming the development to ThePrint, a senior official in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) said, "We are working on guidelines for reopening of schools after the lockdown and we plan to call only older students because there is a lot of safety risk with younger students. One cannot expect the younger children to maintain physical distance, wear masks and follow the hygiene rules at all times and we do not want to put them to risk."

The official added that the guidelines on this will be released this week after consultation with other ministries such as health and home affairs.

Zone plan for reopening schools

The officials also said that schools will reopen according to the zones they are in — those in green and orange zones will be the first to open.

The ministry has followed the same rule to re-start the pending admissions for Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV) last week. KV admissions usually take place during March, but had to be postponed because of the increasing number of coronavirus cases. The admissions have now begun in districts falling under green and orange zones, officials in the ministry informed.

"The decision to reopen schools cannot be taken by the HRD Ministry alone, we need to take the clearance from Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health. Once all the ministries give a go-ahead, only then we can take a call," said another officer.

The officer added that it is not apt to give a tentative school opening date at this time but if the situation normalises, schools can be opened by July with 30 per cent attendance and social-distancing norms in place.

Apart from this, the guidelines will also include a training module which teachers will have to undergo before schools reopen.

Sources familiar with the development said that teachers will be trained on how to ensure distance between students inside the classroom and school campus.

"A lot of things will have to be changed inside the schools once they reopen and teachers will have to be trained accordingly. Schools will have to conduct teacher training before they decide to reopen," said a source.

A ban on school assemblies is also a part of the plan.

5.11 Lockdown extension: Focus on Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and 9 other cities

Source: livemint.com,29 May,2020

- India imposed a national lockdown on March 24 to curb the spread of the virus

- Cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba and state chief secretaries took stock of the situation ahead of the end of the lockdown 4.0

India imposed a national lockdown on May 24 to curb the spread of the virus

As India entered the final phase of nationwide lockdown, the centre on Thursday explored the strategy to contain the virus spread in the worst-affected areas. India identified 13 cities that had contributed 70% of the total coronavirus cases in the country. With the

states registering over 7,000 fresh cases in last 24 hours, India's COVID-19 tally crossed 1.65 lakh-mark today.

These 13 cities were Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Thane, Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Howrah, Indore, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Chengalpattu and Thiruvallur. Cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba and state chief secretaries took stock of the situation in these cities ahead of the end of the lockdown 4.0. The measures taken by the officials and the staff of the municipal corporations for the management of COVID-19 cases were reviewed in the meeting.

India imposed a national lockdown on March 24 to curb the spread of the virus. During the fourth phase of the lockdown, the states were allowed demarcate "red", "orange" and "green" zones in their territories, based on spread of the virus in each area. District-level officials will decide containment and buffer zone boundaries, the centre added. Several norms were relaxed to restart that economy. India resumed domestic flight operations from this week.

The centre on Thursday focused on mapping the containment and buffer zones in the most-affected areas. The central government earlier issued guidelines on management of COVID-19 in urban settlements.

"The central government has stressed that containment zones are to be geographically defined based on factors like mapping of cases and contacts and their geographical dispersion. This would enable in demarcating a well defined perimeter and enforcing the strict protocol of lockdown," the statement said.

"Municipal corporations can decide if residential colonies, mohallas, municipal wards or police-station areas, municipal zones, towns can be designated as containment zones, as required," it said.

The above mentioned cities were advised that the area should be appropriately defined by the district administration and local urban body with technical inputs from local level.

Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant said the central government may extend the ongoing lockdown by 15 days, news agency IANS reported. "I had a telephonic conversation with Amit Shah ji yesterday. It appears that the lockdown in the current state, may continue for 15 more days," Sawant said.

India overtook Turkey and became ninth country to report the most number of coronavirus cases in the world, according to John Hopkins University. Coronavirus claimed 4,659 lives in the country. India's coronavirus death toll topped the number of lives lost in China.

5.12 Covid-19: India now seventh worst-hit country in the world

Source: hindustantimes.com,31 May,2020

India had become the 10th worst affected country on May 25 when the Covid-19 tally went past 138,000. India had then overtaken Iran which had 135,000 cases to enter the top 10 list.

India's Covid-19 cases have spiked rapidly in the last week with the death toll standing at 5164 as of May 31, 2020

India is now the seventh worst hit country by the Covid-19 pandemic with a tally of 1,82,143 cases including 5,164 casualties, according to the World health Organisation coronavirus tracker.

On Sunday, the total number of Covid-19 cases across the world stood at 5,934,936 including 367,166 deaths, the WHO said.

Despite India's surging numbers it can take solace from the fact that it is still far behind the United States which leads the table with 1,818,983 cases. The US death toll is 101,567 but its casualties have fallen from a high of 5,475 on May 10 to 1,263 on Sunday (May 31).

Brazil is in the second spot with 501,985 cases while Russia is third with 405,843 cases.

UK, Spain and Italy are three other countries worse off than India.

On Sunday, India recorded 8,380 positive cases of Covid-19 in the highest single day spike so far.

India's death rate has spiked on two days in May. It recorded 195 deaths on May 5 before it shot up to 265 casualties on May 30 for the highest single day death toll.

India had become the 10th worst affected country on May 25 when the Covid-19 tally went past 138,000. India had then overtaken Iran which had 135,000 cases to enter the top 10 list.

Maharashtra continues to be the state with the highest Covid-19 cases in India but now almost all states are reported a surge in positive cases of coronavirus.

JUNE 2020

6.1 India coronavirus, COVID-19 live updates, June 1: Delhi's COVID-19 count rises to 20,834 after 990 new cases in last 24 hrs; death count at 523

Source: zeenews.india.com,1 June,2020

As India enters the first day of lockdown 5, the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise as 8,392 new infections and 230 deaths reported in the last 24 hours in India. Total number of cases in the country now at 1,90,535 including 93322 active cases, 91819 cured/discharged/migrated and 5394 deaths as per the data of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

As India enters the first day of lockdown 5, the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise as 8,392 new infections and 230 deaths reported in the last 24 hours in India. Total number of cases in the country now at 1,90,535 including 93322 active cases, 91819 cured/discharged/migrated and 5394 deaths as per the data of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Maharashtra continues to be the worst-hit state in the country with 67,655 positive cases of coronavirus, as on May 31. Mumbai alone accounts for 39,686 of the total 67k cases of the state. The number of active cases of COVID-19 in Maharashtra stands at 36,040.

India has now become the world's seventh worst-hit country in terms of coronavirus cases with its tally of 1,82,143, according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Covid-19 tracker.

The number of active Covid-19 cases stood to 89,995, while 86,983 people have recovered and one patient has migrated.

Several states released guidelines for the fifth phase of lockdown, or 'Unlock 1.0', starting Monday, June 1.

6.2 Maharashtra records 139 COVID-19 deaths, total cases cross 80,000

Source: dnaindia.com,5 June,2020

India is the 7th most-affected country while it was the 11 on the list on May 18.

The number of coronavirus cases in India has marked significant and consecutive highest jumps over a major part of the last two weeks.

On Thursday, the total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection in India crossed the 2.25 lakh-mark, while the death toll breached the 6,300-mark as well. With this, India

has now become the world's seventh worst-hit country in terms of coronavirus cases, according to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) COVID-19 tracker.

Maharashtra continues to be the epicenter of the coronavirus spread where the number of cases has witnessed an even large spike recently. According to the Health Ministry, Maharashtra has the highest number of cases with nearly 78,000 positive cases of infection while the death toll has crossed 2,700. As many as 2,933 COVID-19 cases were reported from the state on Thursday.

Delhi is the worst-affected Union Territory with over 25,000 cases and 650 deaths while Gujarat has reported over 18,000 cases with more than 1,100 deaths.

Earlier last week, the Centre announced plans to unlock the country and issued guidelines for the opening of various businesses with social distancing norms. India has been under lockdown since March 25, which was to end on April 14, but was later extended till May 3 then further till May 17 and May 31.

The current phase of re-opening, called 'Unlock 1', takes an economic focus. The government intends on being smart about implementing the lockdown in select places so that the economic activity of the country, as a whole, does not take any more hits. The rising number of coronavirus disease cases for the past few weeks in the country has led the Centre to take this call in order to prevent COVID-19 from spreading further. According to the new guidelines, all activities outside of containment zones have been allowed to resume in a phased manner from June 1. The guidelines will come into effect from June 1 and will be effective till June 30.

The Union Health Ministry on Thursday released the standard operating procedure (SOPs) for malls, restaurants and hotels as they plan to open these establishments under relaxed guidelines from June 8.

The SOPs include measures like allowing only asymptomatic

Here are all the latest coronavirus disease (COVID-19)-related updates in India on June 05, 2020

23:46 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Maharashtra records 139 deaths today, the highest number of deaths due to COVID-19 in a single day. 2436 persons tested positive for COVID-19 in the state today.

Total cases: 80,229 (2,436 new cases)

Deaths: 2,849 (139 today)

Recovered: 35,156 (1,475 patients discharged today)

Active cases: 42,224

People tested so far: 5,22,946

22:34 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Gujarat Update:

Total cases: 19,119 (new cases 510)

Death toll: 1,190 (35 deaths today)

Discharged: 13,011 (344 recovered today)

Active cases: 4,918

People tested so far: 2,39,911

21:15 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Gautam Buddh Nagar update

27 cases found in last 24 hours

Total cases - 570

Active cases - 209

20:08 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

West Bengal reports highest single-day spike

New cases - 427

Total active cases - 4025

Total cases - 7073

Deaths in 24 hrs - 11

Total deaths - 294

Discharged in 24 hrs - 144

Today Sample Tested-9686

19:36 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

In last 24 hours, 12 deaths and 502 new COVID-19 positive cases reported in Uttar Pradesh, taking the total death toll to 257 and number of positive cases to 9733. There are 3828 active cases: State Health Deapartment

18:24 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Tamil Nadu update:

New cases: 1438

Total cases: 28,694

12 deaths, total 232 deaths

5.60L samples tested

17:42 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Karnataka update:

New Cases Reported: 515

Total Positive Cases: 4835

Total COVID Deaths: 57

Today's Discharges: 83

Total Discharges: 1688

Total Active Cases: 3088

Death of COVID positive patient due to Non-COVID cause: 02

13:30 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Jammu and Kashmir: The death toll due to COVID-19 in the territory rose to 36 as a woman died at a hospital, officials said on Friday.

13:00 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Rajasthan: 68 new COVID19 positive cases reported in the state, taking the total number of cases to 9930. The death toll stands at 213.

12:30 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Jharkhand: A 70-year-old man from Simdega has died due to COVID-19 infection. Death toll in the state stands at seven.

11:45 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Around 20 staff members of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) have tested positive for COVID-19. All of them are asymptomatic and are doing well: DMRC officials.

11:10 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Odisha: 130 new COVID-19 positive cases have been reported in the state, taking the total number of positive cases to 2608. The number of active cases stands at 1117.

10:20 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Nagaland: 14 new positive cases of COVID19 have been reported in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of positive cases to 94.

10:00 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

ICMR sample testing: Total 43,86,376 samples have been tested till now, of which 1,43,661 samples have been tested in the last 24 hours.

09:15 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

In the last 24 hours, 9851 new cases and 273 deaths were reported throughout the country, both highest in a single day in India till now. Recovery rate 48.27%.

09:15 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Coronavirus cases in India rise to 2,26,770 which includes 1,10,960 active cases, 1,09,461 recovered cases, 1 migrant patient and 6,348 deaths.

07:06 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Maharashtra COVID-19 update:

Total cases: 77,793 (2,933 new cases)

Death toll: 2,710 (123 new fatalities)

07:06 IST Friday, 5 June 2020

Delhi update:

Total cases: 25,004 (1359 new cases)

Death toll: 650 (reports of 44 deaths were received in the last 24 hours but only 24 deaths took place in the period)

Active cases: 14,456

6.3 Shopping malls, restaurants and hotels to reopen from June 8: List of dos and don'ts

Source: hindustantimes.com,7 June,2020

The Centre had issued a notification to phase-wise reopen some places and start activities from June 8. These things are being allowed in the first part. The second phase of relaxations till come in July.

Monday (June 8) will almost bring an end to the stringent restrictions imposed by the Centre to control the spread of the coronavirus disease. After the central government's recent order, malls, restaurants and religious places will reopen after a gap of more than 70 days.

Workers clean the entrance gate of a shop in mall in Noida on Saturday ahead of its re-opening on June 8

The Centre had on May 30 said that 'Unlock 1' will be initiated in the country from June 8 under which the nationwide Covid-19 lockdown that was clamped on March 25 will be

relaxed to a great extent. It had, however, said that strict restrictions will remain in place till June 30 in the country's worst-hit areas or Covid-19 hotspots.

However, various state governments have said that these places and activities will be allowed to resume only if precautionary measures laid down by the Centre against coronavirus are followed.

Here is a list of what will open from Monday:

Restaurants: The Centre has allowed opening of restaurants from June 8. But at the same time, it also released a list of the SOPs to be followed. Seating arrangement has to be made in such a way that adequate social distancing is maintained. In restaurants, not more than 50 per cent of seating capacity will be permitted. The restaurants have been advised to use disposable menus.

Places of worship: These have been allowed to open but their administrators have been asked to strictly follow social distancing norms and other protocols to check the spread of the coronavirus disease. Also, touching of statues, idols and holy books is not allowed. No physical offering, prasad or holy water allowed; the devotees have to take off their shoes in their vehicles only. Physical contact should be avoided as much as possible.

Shopping malls: Only asymptomatic customers or visitors will be allowed, and the number of customers inside a shop has to be kept minimum. The government has made mall management responsible for ensuring social distancing is followed. The mall administrations have been asked to deploy adequate manpower for this. The mall entrances should mandatorily have sanitiser dispenser and thermal screening provisions. Gaming arcade, children's play area and cinema halls inside the mall will remain closed. There is also a bar on trial of clothing.

Hotels: Though hotels have been allowed to reopen, they have to maintain a proper record of the travel history of all the guests and their medical condition. The guests will also have to fill the self-declaration form. The hotels have been ordered to ensure contact-less check-in and check-out and sanitise the luggage before sending it to the rooms.

This is the first phase of relaxations (known as Unlock 1). International air travel, metro rail, gymnasiums, swimming pools, entertainment parks, bars, auditoriums and assembly halls will remain suspended for the time being. The Centre will decide on reopening of schools and colleges in the second phase in July.

The fourth phase of the nationwide lockdown ended on May 31 and the Centre gave time till June 8 for the new relaxations to come into effect while extending the overarching lockdown to June 30.

The Centre's notification added that all activities will be permitted outside the containment zones which are now being decided individually by states and union territories based on the local factors.

6.4 Coronavirus June 9 Highlights: Over 2,500 fresh cases in Maharashtra; Tripura reports first covid-19 death

Source: indianexpress.com,10 June,2020

India has reported 9,987 cases of coronavirus in the last 24 hours, taking the country's tally to 2,66,598 infections.

India is better positioned in the fight against COVID-19 compared to other nations but there is no space for complacency, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Tuesday,

A boy at Sarojini Nagar market in Delhi

even as a record rise in coronavirus cases for the sixth consecutive day in the country pushed the tally to over 2.6 lakh. A total of 266 new COVID-19 fatalities and 9,987 cases were reported in the last 24 hours. The death toll due to the coronavirus infection rose to 7,466 and the cases mounted to 2,66,598 in the country. With India relaxing restrictions, a surge in cases is expected to begin soon. Several states like Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Tripura have been showing a spurt in cases.

In other news, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tested negative for covid-19, a day after he showed symptoms of the infection. Meanwhile, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia asserted that the number of COVID-19 cases in Delhi will explode to 5.5 lakhs by the end of July even though the Centre said there is no community transmission of the virus in the capital.

The Supreme Court, on the other hand, asked worst Covid-19 affected state Maharashtra to make concerted effort in sending the migrant workers still stranded there to their native places. The top court, which directed all states and Union Territories to transport all stranded workers by train, bus or other mode within 15 days, said there were "huge lapses" by the Maharashtra authorities in dealing with the issue.

Globally, the number of people infected with coronavirus rose to 7,119,736 with as many as 406,542 fatalities.

6.5 Coronavirus in India LIVE: 3,08,993 COVID-19 cases, 8884 deaths; highest single-day spike of 11,458 cases

Source: dnaindia.com,13 June,2020

The coronavirus cases in India has crossed the three lakh-mark as it continues to witness close to 10,000 cases every day. The virus has spread rapidly and the country has marked

significant and consecutive highest jumps in the COVID-19 tally over a major part of the past two weeks. India's COVID-19 count has hit a new high, crossing the 3.09 lakh-mark, while the death toll is nearing the 9,000-mark as well.

Maharashtra continues to be the epicenter of the coronavirus spread where the number of cases has witnessed an even large spike recently. According to the Health Ministry, Maharashtra has the highest number of cases with more than one lakh positive cases of infection and over 3,700 deaths. As many as 3,493 new COVID-19 cases were reported from the state in the past 24 hours.

Shopping malls, religious places, hotels, and restaurants have now been reopened in most states from earlier this week after more than two months of sustained lockdown. The current phase of re-opening, called 'Unlock 1', takes an economic focus. The government intends on being smart about implementing the lockdown in select places so that the economic activity of the country, as a whole, does not take any more hits.

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had also released the standard operating procedure (SOPs) for malls, restaurants, and hotels as they opened these establishments under relaxed guidelines. But a lot of details were also left to the discretion of the states to finetune.

Here are all the latest coronavirus disease (COVID-19)-related updates in India on June 13, 2020 (Saturday):

09:59 IST Saturday, 13 June 2020

Out of the 2220 samples tested yesterday for #COVID19, results of 71 are positive: King George's Medical University (KGMU), Lucknow.

09:14 IST Saturday, 13 June 2020

India crosses 3 lakh mark as it reports the highest single-day spike of 11,458 new #COVID19 cases; total cases rise to 308993; 386 deaths in the last 24 hours. There are 145779 active cases, 154330 cured/discharged/migrated & 8884 deaths in the country so far: Ministry of Health

09:06 IST Saturday, 13 June 2020

On Saturdays, shops in the state which used to close at 7 pm will close at 5 pm. Essential shops can continue to remain open till 7 pm on those days. Restaurants & liquor shops will continue to remain open till 8 pm & movement will continue till 9 pm: Ludhiana Police Commissioner

07:42 IST Saturday, 13 June 2020

Ladakh: 124 people test positive for COVID-19 in Ladakh in the last two days, taking the number of cases in the region to 239.

07:03 IST Saturday, 13 June 2020

Railway Protection Force, Pune on Friday launched Robotic Captain Arjun to intensify the screening and surveillance.

07:01 IST Saturday, 13 June 2020

Delhi Food and Supplies department's vigilance branch closed as the officer's husband tests positive. (PTI story)

6.6 June shoot of Covid-19: Growl of raging coronavirus in India

Source: indiatoday.in,15 June ,2020

People spending their evening on the promenade at Marine Drive in Mumbai on June 14

June has been tough for India. The issue if migrants and a worsening economic situation forced central and state governments to exit the coronavirus lockdown. This period has coincided with a shoot in Covid-19 numbers.

Since the turn of June, Covid-19 numbers have gone from 1.76 lakh to 3.32 lakh, recording an absolute rise of 1,55,772 cases of the novel coronavirus as of June 15 morning. On its own, the absolute addition would make a country a member of the worst-10 affected countries group.

In percentage terms, the prevalence of Covid-19 in India has seen an increase of over 88 per cent in just two weeks.

Most of these surging new cases have come from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Delhi. Maharashtra saw an increase of 42,793 cases in the month of June, rising from 65,000 to about 1.08 lakh.

Tamil Nadu more than doubled its tally during this period. It had 21,184 cases on May 31. Those have now gone up to 44,661 - an increase of 23,477 cases or over 110 per cent of caseloads.

Delhi too recorded a similar rise of 22,633 cases, or over 122 per cent. Together, these states added 88,903 fresh cases in June itself. This number makes over 57 per cent of the total rise in India's Covid-19 caseload in June.

To put this in perspective, Maharasthra, Tamil Nadu and Delhi have added more cases of Covid-19 during June than the entire caseload of China since the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic sometime in November-December last year.

INDIA VERSUS WORSE

Globally, India was placed at the eighth place on May 31 having already overtaken France and Turkey. India is now placed fourth after the US, Brazil and Russia. But in terms of fresh cases in June, India is placed third.

Russia with the more than double the size of India's base caseload on May 31, added more than 52,000 fewer Covid-19 patients in the two weeks of June. The UK added 22,000 cases while India overtook it during the period.

Germany, Italy and Spain added only 4,000-5,000 cases with a bigger base than India. Spain has a unique scenario. It revised both its caseloads and death toll numbers downward stating it had wrongly identified cases as Covid-19.

As for death toll, India has recorded third highest death toll due to Covid-19 in the first half of June after Brazil and the US. Brazil registered nearly 13,950 Covid-19 deaths, the US 13,899 and India 4,356 during the period.

IN THE COURTYARD

India's June death toll is over 45 per cent of total deaths due to the coronavirus pandemic. Of the total Covid-19 deaths (9,520 as of June 15 morning), around 41.5 per cent has happened in Maharashtra (3,950).

Including Gujarat (1,477) and Delhi (1,322), the three states account for almost 71 per cent of total Covid deaths in the country. These three states have added 3,634 to the overall death toll in June in India. That is about 83.5 per cent of total deaths India has recorded due to Covid-19 pandemic.

The silver lining, however, for India in the dark clouds of coronavirus pandemic is that India has upped its recovery rate beyond 50 per cent. On May 31, India has a recovery rate of 49.2 per cent with 86,980 recoveries. Now, it is over 51 per cent with nearly 1.7 lakh recovered patients of Covid-19. All India figures are from Aarogya Setu app database.

But why did India see this rise in June?

According to a study by an ICMR mandated group, it might have something to do with the coronavirus lockdown. The study found that lockdown shielded India from an immediate outburst of Covid-19 pandemic.

The ICMR research group estimates that the lockdown delayed coronavirus peak by anywhere between 34 and 76 days. So, if the earlier estimate of the Covid-19 cases peaking in July is taken as the departure line, the new peak may now be seen sometime in November. The researchers estimate that at the peak numbers, India may face a shortage of isolation beds for 5.4 months, ICU beds for 4.6 months and ventilators for 3.9 months.

However, all these projections are based on the current trends - of government intervention, infectivity of the virus, discipline of people and ramping up of tools to fight back a raging pandemic.

6.7 India's Covid fatality rate goes up as 2,003 deaths get added in a day following audit

Source: theprint.in,17 June ,2020

Not all of the 2,003 deaths, which accounted for India's highest daily spike Wednesday, occurred in the past 24 days, but were retrospectively added.

New Delhi: The addition of over 2,003 deaths in one day has sharply increased India's Covid-19 fatality rate to 3.36 per cent from 2.8 per cent on 3 June.

This is still lower than the global Covid-19 death rate of over 5 per cent, but as more and more states reconcile death figures retrospectively, some with the help of audit committees, the percentage is expected to keep rising in the coming days.

The number of deaths as a percentage of closed cases — which includes cases that have either recovered or succumbed to the disease — is even higher at 5.9 per cent.

As of Wednesday morning, India registered 1,98,837 closed cases — 11,903 deaths and 1,86,934 recoveries — according to the Union health ministry.

Based on these numbers, the recovery rate also shoots up dramatically to 94 per cent if calculated on closed cases. The government's current figure stands at 52.8 per cent, calculated on the total reported cases.

File photo of people carrying the body of a Covid-19 patient to crematorium

The states that account for most of India's 2,003 deaths are Maharashtra (1,409), Delhi (437), Tamil Nadu (49) and Haryana (18).

Changing death rates

Retrospective reconciliation of deaths figures is not unique to India. Many other countries have done it too. Italy revised its Covid death toll in Bergamo, its worst-hit city, by over 2,000 post facto. Spain ended up reducing its count as did the US state of Colorado.

What led to the sharp spurt in deaths in just a day, officials said, was the inclusion of earlier unreported deaths, mostly in Maharashtra and Delhi. The officials added the spurt did not mean there had been an over 400 per cent jump in the deaths occurring in one day.

On Tuesday, the number of deaths had gone up by 470.

Maharashtra, for example, said just 81 of the 1,409 deaths reported Wednesday occurred in the past 24 hours. The remaining 1,328 deaths were added after an audit that determined deaths that had happened earlier were due to Covid.

The discrepancy had surfaced while an exercise was on to match the state data with that of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), officials said. There will likely be more of such updates in the state in the coming days.

Delhi, which reported 93 deaths Tuesday, saw its total rise from 1,400 to 1,837 Wednesday.

"This cumulative figure includes all pending deaths reported to and audited by Death Audit Committee," said the state government bulletin for the day.

Tamil Nadu had stumbled upon "missing deaths" last week, after which it replaced health secretary Beela Rajesh with J. Radhakrishnan. Over the last two days, it has been reporting more than 40 deaths as compared to earlier, when the number would be usually below 20.

Recovery rate calculation

According to the central government, the recovery rate currently stands at 52.8 per cent. This is calculated by taking into account only the number of recovered and discharged cases and dividing it by the total number of cases reported, including the active ones.

Experts, however, pointed out that the recovery rate should ideally be calculated on the number of closed cases rather than the total number.

If done so, the recovery rate climbs significantly higher to 94 per cent.

In a statement issued Wednesday, the health ministry said as many as 6,922 patients have recovered in the last 24 hours, taking the total recoveries to 1,86,934 patients. It added that as many as 1,55,227 cases are currently active and under medical supervision.

The number of government labs have also been increased to 674 and private labs are up to 250 (total 924 labs). These labs have tested 1,63,187 samples in the past 24 hours while the total number of samples tested so far is 60,84,256, the ministry said.

India ranks fourth in the world for highest number of coronavirus cases reported.

6.8 India coronavirus numbers explained: Telangana finally begins reporting testing numbers

Source: indianexpress.com,20 June,2020

India Coronavirus Cases Numbers: Telangana, the only state not revealing testing numbers so far, began doing so from Tuesday. And predictably, the numbers are among the lowest in the country.
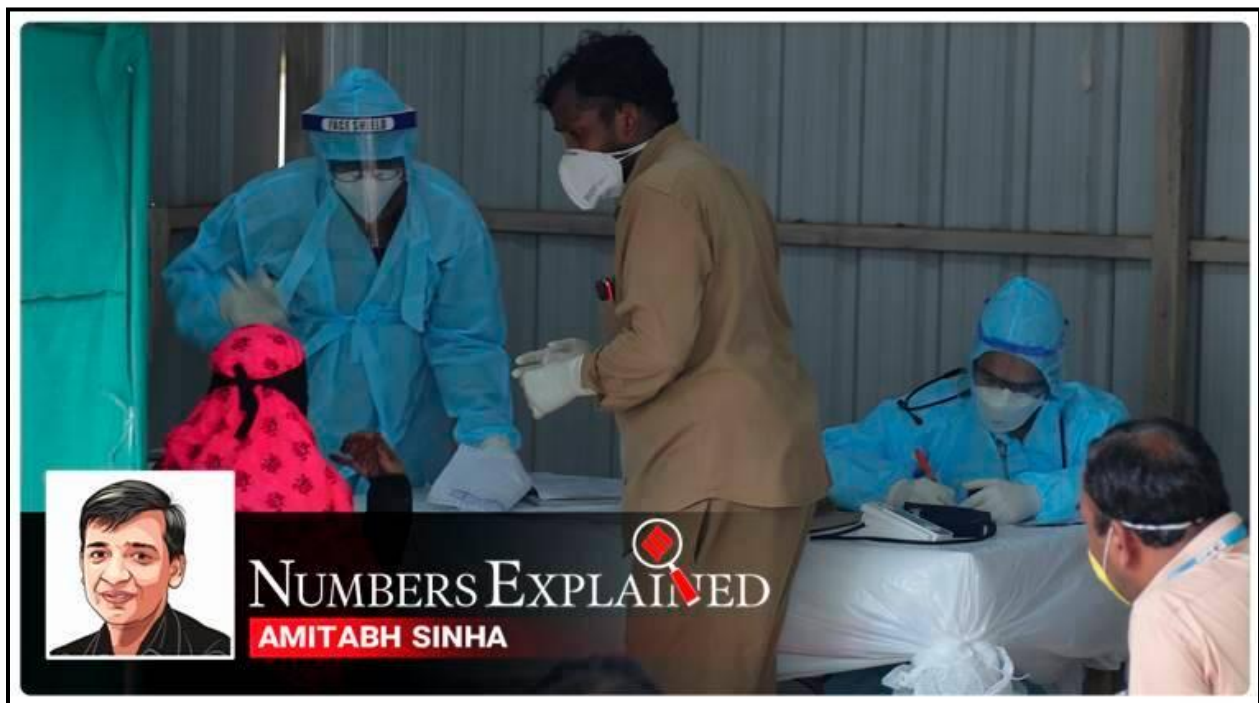
Coronavirus numbers explained: A doctor speaks with a woman at a coronavirus help desk at the Government Fever Hospital in Hyderabad, Wednesday

India Coronavirus (Covid-19) Cases: After Maharashtra and Delhi were pushed into revealing hundreds of previously unreported deaths of coronavirus-positive patients, it is now the turn of Telangana to finally start reporting the number of tests it has been carrying out.

Telangana, the only state not revealing testing numbers so far, despite directions from its High Court, began doing so from Tuesday. And predictably, the numbers are among the lowest in the country.

The state has tested only 45,911 samples till date.

Neighbouring Andhra Pradesh has tested almost six lakh samples. Much smaller states like Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Tripura, with caseloads much lower than Telangana, have carried out more tests. Even Goa has tested as many.

With more than 5,600 total infections, over 2,500 of which are active cases, Telangana's problem is in no ways smaller than Andhra Pradesh, which has a little over 7,000 confirmed infections.

It also has more than double the number of dead compared to Andhra Pradesh. But Telangana's testing strategy has been puzzling.

It has earned the state government repeated reprimands from the High Court which has not only directed it to increase the number of tests, but also allow private hospitals and ICMR-accredited laboratories to carry out tests and treat patients.

 It was only after repeated prodding and criticism that the state government, earlier this week, finally allowed private hospitals to begin treating patients, and accredited private laboratories to start testing.
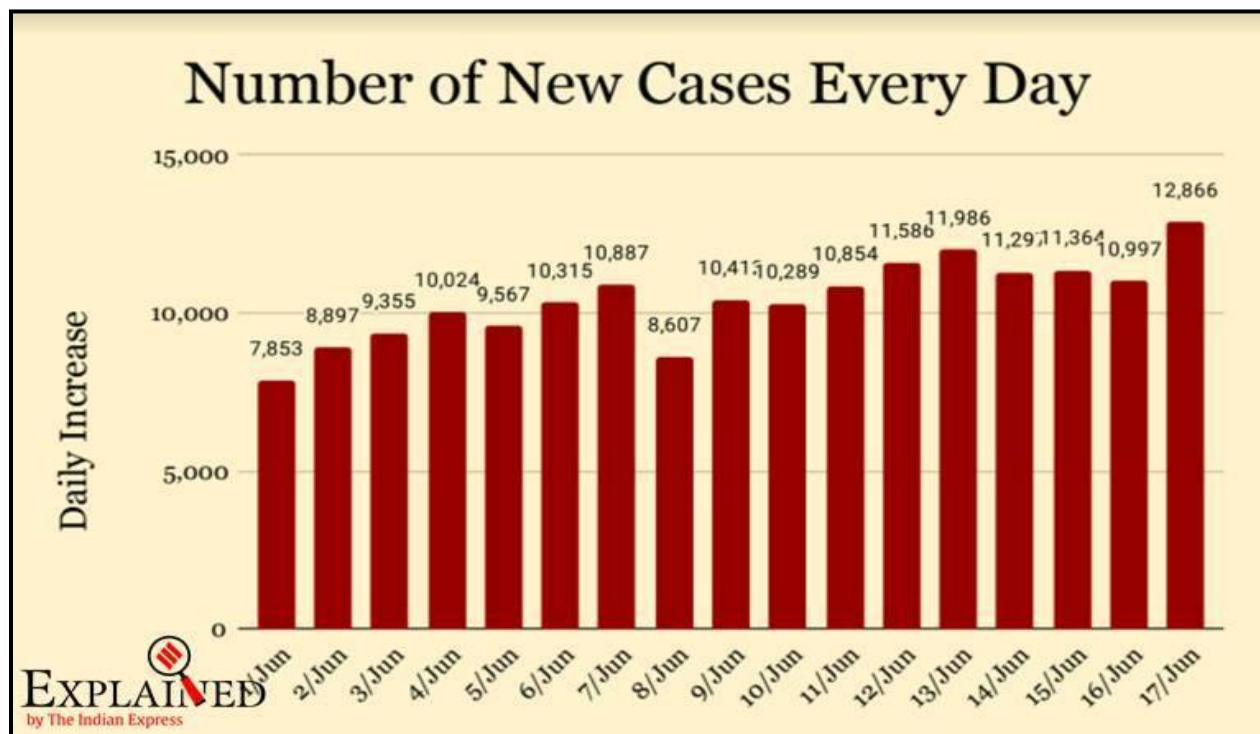
Coronavirus numbers explained: The state government has maintained that it has been following ICMR guidelines on testing

The state government has maintained that it has been following ICMR guidelines on testing.

STATE	TOTAL POSITIVE	NEW CASES	TOTAL RECOVERIES	DEATHS
Maharashtra	116,752	3,307	59,166	5,651
Tamil Nadu	50,193	2,174	27,624	576
Delhi	47,102	2,414	17,457	1,904
Gujarat	25,148	520	17,438	1,561
Uttar Pradesh	15,181	583	9,239	465
Rajasthan	13,429	326	10,354	313
West Bengal	12,300	391	6,533	506
Madhya Pradesh	11,244	175	8,288	482
Haryana	8,832	560	3,952	130
Karnataka	7,734	560	4,804	106

Last month, The Indian Express had revealed that Telangana had conducted just 22,842 tests till May 14. It had less than 1,500 cases at that time. In the next one month, a similar number of samples have been tested while over 3,000 more people have been found to be positive.

The Telangana High Court had also directed the state to even test dead bodies of people who were suspected to have the virus, but the state government has got a reprieve on that one from the Supreme Court, which on Wednesday, put a stay on that order.

Meanwhile, the number of new cases detected across the country went beyond 12,000 for the first time on Wednesday.

Almost 8,000 of these were reported from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Delhi, the three states with maximum cases.

Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, each reported more than 500 cases, and together accounted for another 1,650 new cases. Haryana, fastest growing among the top ten states, now has a little less than 9,000 cases.

People with COVID-19 symptoms wait outside a coronavirus help desk at the Government Fever Hospital in Hyderabad, Wednesday

The number of confirmed infections in the country is now more than 3.67 lakh, of which at least 1.86 lakh have recovered from the disease. A day after more than 2,000 deaths were reported, thanks to revelations from Maharashtra and Delhi about the large number of unreported deaths, the daily death count came back to its normal level on Wednesday. More than 300 deaths were reported across the country, 114 of which came from Maharashtra, 67 from Delhi and 48 from Tamil Nadu.

6.9 June 24, 2020: 15,968 Covid cases in a day take tally past 4.5 lakh; Delhi sees more cases than Maharashtra

Source: indiatoday.in,24 June,2020

In biggest single-day rise, India recorded over 15,500 cases on Wednesday. With these new cases, India's case tally has gone up to 4,56,183.

In yet another biggest single-day spike, India recorded nearly 16,000 new cases of the novel coronavirus on Wednesday. India also saw a spike of 465 deaths due to Covid-19 on Wednesday, taking the death toll to 14,476.

As per the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry's updated data, India saw as many as 15,968 fresh cases of coronavirus in the last 24 hours, ending Wednesday morning.

File photo of a hospital in Delhi

India's total tally of 4,56,183 coronavirus cases includes 1,83,022 active cases, while 2,58,685 have recovered and 14,476 deaths have been reported. LIVE UPDATES HERE

Maharashtra has reported the highest number of cases at 1,39,010 , followed by Delhi at 66,602, according to ministry data.

Delhi's biggest single-day jump of 3,947 fresh infections on Wednesday was, however, higher than Maharashtra, which saw 3,214 fresh cases of coronavirus.

On Tuesday morning, 14,933 people tested positive for coronavirus in a single day, which took India's Covid-19 tally to 4,40,215.

 The death toll, meanwhile, rose to 14,011 with 312 new fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry data.

The country has witnessed a spike of over 2.5 lakh infections from June 1 till date, with Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh contributing to almost 70 per cent of total cases.

6.10 India records highest single-day COVID-19 spike with over 18,000 cases; death toll rises to 15,685

Source: newindianexpress.com,27 June,2020

The COVID-19 caseload zoomed to 5,08,953, while 384 fatalities were recorded in the last 24 hours, the updated figure at 8 am showed.

NEW DELHI: Six days after it recorded four lakh infections, India's COVID-19 tally raced past five lakh on Saturday with the highest single-day surge of 18,552 cases, while the death toll climbed to 15,685, according to Union health ministry data.

The COVID-19 caseload zoomed to 5,08,953, while 384 fatalities were recorded in the last 24 hours, the updated figure at 8 am showed.

It took 110 days for coronavirus infection in the country to reach one lakh while just 39 days more to go past the five lakh-mark on June 27.

This was the fourth consecutive day when coronavirus infection increased by more than 15,000 fourth day while there has been a surge of 3,18,418 infections from June 1 till 27.

The number of active cases stands at 1,97, 387 while 2,95,880 people have recovered and one patient has migrated.

"Thus, around 58.13 per cent patients have recovered so far," an official said.

The total number of confirmed cases include foreigners.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), cumulative total of 79,96,707 samples have been tested up to June 26 with 2,20,479 samples being tested on Friday, the highest in a day since the beginning of the pandemic.

Of the 384 new deaths reported till Saturday morning, 175 were in Maharashtra, 63 in Delhi, 46 in Tamil Nadu, 19 in Uttar Pradesh, 18 in Gujarat, 13 in Haryana, 12 in Andhra Pradesh, 10 each in West Bengal and Karnataka, seven in Telangana, four in Madhya Pradesh, two in Punjab, one each in Jammu and Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

Of the total 15,685 deaths reported so far, Maharashtra tops the tally with 7,106 deaths, followed by Delhi with 2,492 deaths, Gujarat with 1,771, Tamil Nadu with 957, Uttar Pradesh with 630, West Bengal with 616, Madhya Pradesh with 546, Rajasthan with 380 and Telangana with 237 deaths.

The COVID-19 death toll reached 211 in Haryana, 180 in Karnataka, 148 in Andhra Pradesh, 122 in Punjab, 91 in Jammu and Kashmir, 58 in Bihar, 37 in Uttarakhand, 22 in Kerala and 17 in Odisha.

Chhattisgarh has registered 13 deaths, Jharkhand 12, Assam, Puducherry and Himachal Pradesh nine each, Chandigarh six, Goa two and Meghalaya, Tripura, Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh have reported one fatality each, according to the health ministry.

More than 70 per cent deaths took place due to comorbidities, it said.

Maharashtra has reported the highest number of cases at 1,52,765 followed by Delhi at 77,240, Tamil Nadu at 74,622, Gujarat at 30,095, Uttar Pradesh at 20,943, Rajasthan at 16,660 and West Bengal at 16,190, the ministry data stated.

The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 12,884 in Haryana, 12,798 in Madhya Pradesh, 12,349 in Telangana, 11,489 in Andhra Pradesh and 11,005 in Karnataka.

It has risen to 8,716 in Bihar, 6,762 in Jammu and Kashmir, 6,607 in Assam and 6,180 in Odisha.

Punjab has reported 4,957 novel coronavirus infections so far, while Kerala has 3,876 cases.

A total of 2,725 people have been infected by the virus in Uttarakhand, 2,545 in Chhattisgarh, 2,290 in Jharkhand, 1,325 in Tripura, 1,075 in Manipur, 1,039 in Goa, 946 in Ladakh and 864 in Himachal Pradesh.

Puducherry has recorded 502 COVID-19 cases, Chandigarh has 425, Nagaland has 371 and Arunachal Pradesh has 172.

Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu together have reported 163 COVID-19 cases.

Mizoram has 145 cases, Sikkim has 86, Andaman and Nicobar Islands has registered 72 infections so far while Meghalaya has recorded 47 cases.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research)," the ministry said, adding that 8,023 cases are being reassigned to states.

State-wise distribution is subject to further verification and reconciliation, it added.

6.11 Come July, it's lockdown 6.0 in Tamil Nadu

Source: newindianexpress.com,30 June,2020

Intensified lockdown, which is currently in force in Chennai, its neighbouring districts and Madurai, will continue till July 5.

CHENNAI: Brace up, for another round of lockdown is here. Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami on Monday announced extension of certain restrictions till July 31 across the State.

However, the intensified lockdown that is currently being enforced in Chennai, its neighbouring districts, and Madurai will end on Sunday (July 5).

From the following day, the lockdown will be implemented as it was till June 19 in Chennai and surroundings, and for Madurai, as it was before June 23.

Sundays will see complete lockdown. In a major move, Palaniswami has announced that worship would be allowed in small temples, mosques, and churches in all village panchayats from July 1, except within the Chennai police limits.

From July 16, places of worship in Tiruvallur, Chengalpattu, Kancheepuram and Madurai may also allow worship.

These decisions come on a day when the State reported 3,949 cases and 62 deaths, of which 2,167 cases and 37 deaths were in Chennai. The State's tally now stands at 86,224 and toll at 1,141. An increase in deaths among younger patients has sparked concerns.

File photo of a junction near Quaide Millath salai in Triplicane, closed for traffic by placing barricades as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19

Positive: **24** Positive: **882** Positive: **13,869** Positive: **40,137**

TRACING THE CASES ACROSS THE STATE CAPITAL

Chennai's Covid-19 tally has skyrocketed since the enforcement of first lockdown

March 14-31 April 1-30 May 1-31 June 01-29

TALLY	DEATHS	TOLL
86,224	62	1,141

INCREASE IN DEATHS AMONG YOUNG SPARKS CONCERN

HEALTH EXPERTS NOT FOR LOCKDOWN

Chennal: The panel of health experts has said that there is no use in extending the lockdown, considering socio-economic factors. "We have not suggested an extension," Dr Prabhdeep Kaur, ICMR scientist said.

Similarly, a 25 year old man from Chennai with diabetes died a day after being admitted, due to cardiopulmonary arrest, Covid pneumonia, and diabetes mellitus. A 23-year-old Chennai resident, who had no co-morbid conditions, died on June 29 in a private hospital. He had fever, cough, and breathing difficulty for six days.

Earlier in the day, the health experts committee held a two-hour meeting with the Chief Minister. "We have not recommended extending the lockdown. It's not the best solution," said Prabhdeep Kaur, an ICMR Scientist who is a part of the panel, after the meeting.

"Initially, lockdown was necessary and now we need to adopt a new strategy to handle the present situation," said WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan who attended the meeting virtually.

"In the last two weeks, there has been a spike in Tiruchy, Madurai, Vellore and Tiruvannamalai, where the doubling time has come down.

The initiatives enforced in Chennai should be replicated in these districts too.

The indicators to assess the situation in a district includes case growth, number of deaths, doubling time, test positivity, bed occupancy, reserved beds, number of contacts traced, etc. After this, restrictions should be tightened in the areas where the infection rate is high,' said Kaur.

The e-pass system will continue to be in force for inter-State and inter-district travel till July 31, clarified the government.

In places where complete lockdown is being extended, the e-passes issued till June 30 will be valid till July 5. District Collectors will issue e-passes to contractors who are in need to go to other districts for government works.

JULY 2020

7.1 Amid Covid-19 pandemic, Haryana schools set to reopen from July 27

Source:hindustantimes.com,1 July,2020

This comes a day after the Punjab and Haryana High Court on Tuesday allowed private schools to collect tuition fee "irrespective of offering online classes" to students during the Covid-19 lockdown.

File photo: Children seen going school in Gurugram, Haryana

Schools in Haryana are set to reopen from July 27 after summer vacations end on July 26 amid Covid-19 crisis, Haryana Directorate School Education issued an order on Wednesday. As per the order, universities and colleges in the state will remain shut till July 31.

This comes a day after the Punjab and Haryana High Court on Tuesday allowed private schools to collect tuition fee "irrespective of offering online classes" to students during the Covid-19 lockdown.

"All schools irrespective of whether they offered online classes during the lockdown period or not, are entitled to collect the tuition fee," the court said adding that they will continue to endeavour and impart online/ distance learning.

As per the High Court's order, the schools have been restrained from increasing the fee for 2020-21 and directed to adopt the same fee structure as of 2019- 20.

Under the first phase of nationwide Covid-19 lockdown announced by PM Modi on March 25, all educational institutes across the country were shut to keep the virus from spreading. Last month, the Centre had said that a decision on reopening schools across the country will be taken in July based on the prevailing Covid-19 situation.

In its guidelines on the second phase of 'Unlock', the government on Monday announced that educational institutions, Metro rail services and large gatherings will continue to remain banned till the end of July.

The fresh guidelines said schools, colleges and coaching institutions will remain closed till July 31.

It added that Metro rail, cinema halls, gymnasiums, swimming pools, entertainment parks, theatres, bars, auditoriums, assembly halls and similar places will also remain shut. Social, political, sports, entertainment, academic, cultural, religious functions and other large congregations will also continue to be banned.

"Dates for the opening of these will be decided separately, based on the assessment of the situation," the Centre said.

7.2 Kerala's new set of COVID-19 regulations to remain in force till July 2021

Source: thehindu.com,5 July,2020

Persons who spit in public places, refuse to wear masks or cover their face while venturing out of their homes will henceforth face fines if caught in the act by authorities. So would citizens who fail to maintain a minimum physical distance of six feet or 1.8 metres.

The State government has declared any violation of the social code for preventing the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) a compoundable offence as per a notification issued by Governor Arif Mohammad Khan on July 3.

The new set of Kerala Epidemic Disease Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Regulations gives more teeth to law enforcement to crack down on social behaviour that could potentially increase the risk of transmission of the pandemic. The regulation would remain in force for one year or until notified otherwise.

Demonstrations and social gatherings will require prior permission

The current rules came against the backdrop of the decision to re-impose triple lockdown regulations in localities which registered a worrying surge in new cases.

Curbs in place

The government has leaned on the rules to impose severe restrictions on mobility and retail trade in Thiruvananthapuram and Ponnani in Malappuram till July 12 following alarming reports that the regions risked local transmission.

The regulations have placed strict limits on political action.

Henceforth, processions, dharnas, demonstrations, public meetings, congregations and social gatherings would require the prior written permission of the district administration.

Moreover, the government has stipulated that not more than 10 people could participate in any social event or political demonstration. The participants should wear masks and maintain the minimum mandatory physical distance from each other.

New COVID-19 regulations

Police to slap fines on the following violations of the pandemic control social code

The regulations would remain in force for one year or until notified otherwise

- Spitting in public places
- Failure to wear mask or cover face

- Citizens require prior written permission of district authorities to congregate
- Ban on social gathering
- Marriage functions not to be attended by more than 50 persons
- Funeral functions restricted to 20 persons
- Failure to maintain a minimum social distance of six feet (1.8 m)
- Shop floor space and 1.8 m physical distance to determine number of customers

- Limit on number of shoppers in stores and super markets
- Registration in COVID-19 Jagratha e-platform mandatory for permission to enter Kerala from within the country or abroad

Not exceeding 20

The number of people in a shop or commercial establishment should not exceed 20 at a time.

The floor area of the establishment and the 1.8 m physical distance yardstick would define the calculus for determining the number of customers allowed into a shop. Failure on the part of the management to provide hand sanitisers at the entrance would attract fines.

The regulations have given legal sanctity to the State's decision to allow only people who have registered themselves with the COVID-19 Jagrata e-platform to enter Kerala from within the country or abroad.

The State had earlier disagreed with the Centre's directive to allow free inter-State and intra-State travel without any permit or prior notification.

7.3 India coronavirus numbers explained: New peak powered by southern states

Source: indianexpress.com,7 July,2020

India Coronavirus Cases Numbers: The surge in Karantaka and Telangana, and also in Andhra Pradesh, along with consistent high numbers from Tamil Nadu has ensured that the contribution of the five southern states has gone beyond 25 per cent.

India Coronavirus Numbers: India was poised to overtake Russia and become the country with the third-largest caseload in the world, as another day's surge in the southern states took India's novel Coronavirus numbers to a new peak on Saturday.

As close to 25,000 new infections were added on Saturday, India's caseload reached 6.73 lakh, just a few hundred less than that of Russia. The United States, with more than 28 lakh cases, and Brazil, which has more than 15 lakh, are the only two countries with bigger caseloads than India.

Saturday's record number was once again powered by the five southern states, each of which is witnessing a growth that is faster than the national growth rate (7-day compounded daily growth rate). The surge is coming mainly from Telangana and Karnataka, each of which reported more than 1,800 new cases on Saturday, and moved up another ladder in the top ten list of states with highest caseloads in the country.

STATE	TOTAL POSITIVE	NEW CASES	TOTAL RECOVERIES	DEATHS
Maharashtra	200,064	7,074	108,082	8,671
Tamil Nadu	107,001	4,280	60,592	1,450
Delhi	97,200	2,505	68,256	3,004
Gujarat	35,398	712	25,414	1,927
Uttar Pradesh	26,554	757	18,154	773
Telangana	22,312	1,850	11,537	288
Karnataka	21,549	1,839	9,244	339
West Bengal	21,231	743	14,166	736
Rajasthan	19,416	479	15,527	447
Andhra Pradesh	17,699	765	8,008	218
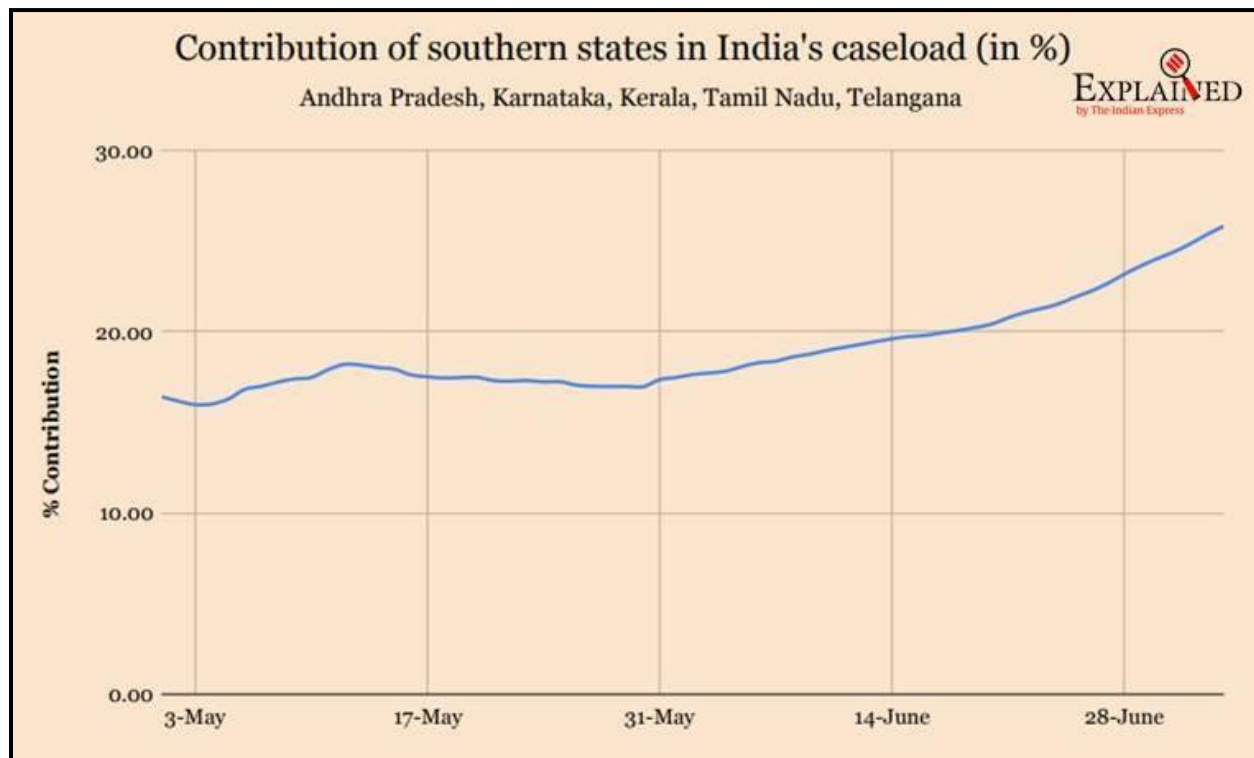
Contribution of southern states in India's caseload (in %)
Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana

Saturday's record number was once again powered by the five southern states, each of which is witnessing a growth that is faster than the national growth rate

Tamil Nadu also reported more than 4,200 new cases, though it was Maharashtra once again that had the maximum number of cases. Maharashtra reported more than 7,000 new cases for the first time on Saturday, and its total confirmed cases crossed the 2-lakh mark.

The surge in Karantaka and Telangana, and also in Andhra Pradesh, along with consistent high numbers from Tamil Nadu has ensured that the contribution of the five southern states in the national caseload has gone beyond 25 per cent for the first time. This number has been steadily increasing since the start of June, when it was about 17.5 per cent (see accompanying graph).

The rise has been more pronounced in the last three weeks as Telangana finally increased the number of samples it was testing. The surge in Karnataka and Telangana happened almost simultaneously, and these two currently are the states with the highest growth rates.

Telangana is growing (7-day compounded daily growth rate) at 7.51 per cent while Karnataka is growing at 8.82 per cent. The current growth rate for India as a whole is only 3.47 per cent. Tamil Nadu, the state with the second-highest caseload in the country with more than one lakh confirmed cases, has also been consistently contributing high numbers, more than 4,000 for the last one week, through its growth is more sedate, currently 4.56 per cent.

As close to 25,000 new infections were added on Saturday, India's caseload reached 6.73 lakh, just a few hundred less than that of Russia

Number of New Cases Every Day
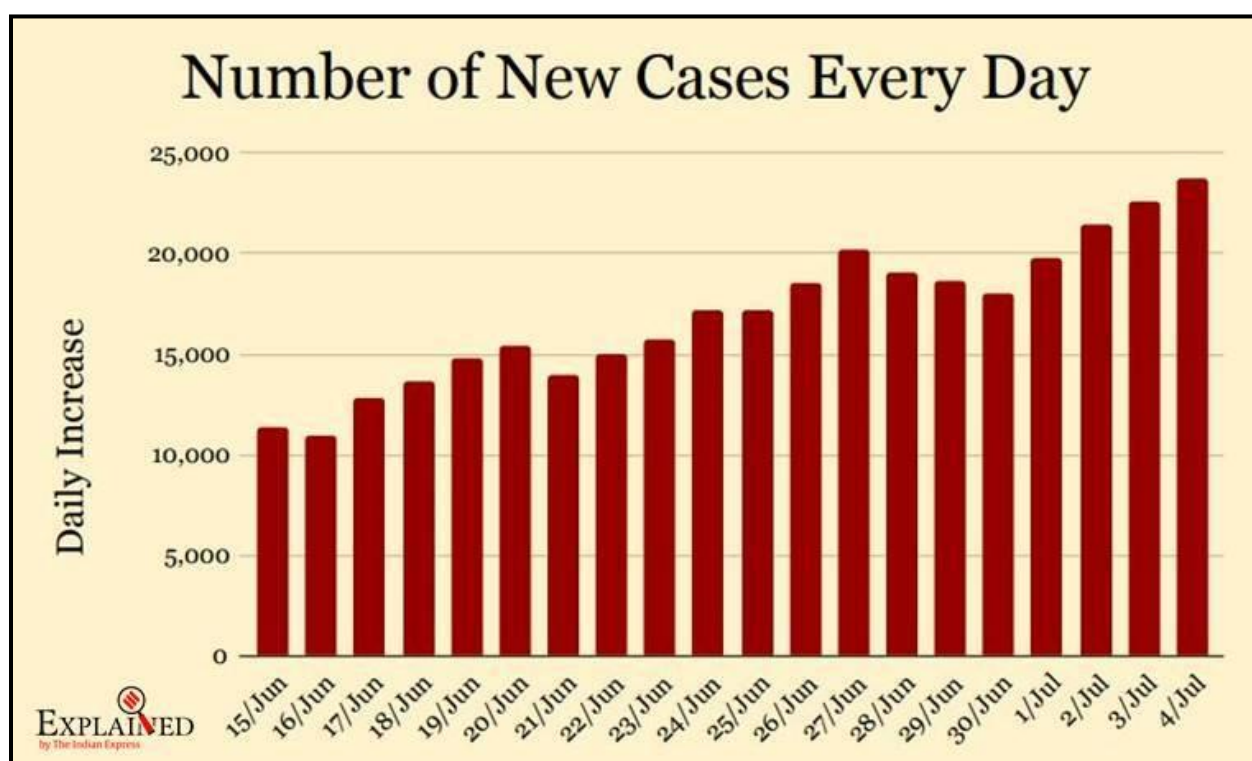
The only exception to the southern surge has been Kerala, which has the lowest caseload and growth rate amongst the five states. With just over 5,200 confirmed infections as of now, the state has less than one-third of the cases in Andhra Pradesh. The other three states have much higher caseloads. Kerala's current growth rate is 3.57 per cent, marginally higher than the national rate.

Kerala is also the only southern state not to be in the top ten list of states with maximum caseload. The other four are the only ones in the top ten that are growing faster than the national rate. Odisha has also begun to grow faster in the last two weeks. The state has added almost 2,500 new cases in the last one week, and its current growth rate, 4.61 per cent, is significantly higher than the national rate. The state now has 9,070 confirmed infections out of which almost 6,000 have recovered, and 45 have died.

7.4 Covid-19: Pune to go on 10-day lockdown starting July 13

Source: indiatoday.in,10 July,2020

The lockdown will come into force from midnight of July 13 and end on July 23.

The district reported a record spike of 1,803 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday that pushed the tally to 34,399, while the toll rose to 978

In a bid to stem the spread of COVID-19, a 10-day lockdown will be imposed in Pune, neighbouring Pimpri-Chinchwad and a few other parts of the district starting July 13, a senior official said on Friday.

The lockdown will come into force from midnight of July 13 and end on July 23, he said.

The district reported a record spike of 1,803 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday that pushed the tally to 34,399, while the toll rose to 978.

The decision to enforce the lockdown was taken in a meeting chaired by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and district guardian minister Ajit Pawar here, the official said.

"A lockdown will be imposed in Pune, Pimpri Chinchwad and some other areas of the district considering the rise in COVID-19 cases," divisional commissioner (Pune division) Deepak Mhaisekar said.

The lockdown period between July 13 and July 18 will be stricter, wherein only milk shops, pharmacies and clinics will be allowed to operate, he said.

Emergency services have been excluded from the lockdown, he added.

Meanwhile, district collector Naval Kishore Ram said the decision was taken to break the chain of viral spread.

A detailed order about the lockdown will be issued soon, Pune municipal commissioner Shekhar Gaikwad said.

7.5 Tamil Nadu records 4244 new COVID-19 cases, 68 deaths in fresh spike

Source: newindianexpress.com, 12 July, 2020

Chennai alone recorded 1,168 cases and 32 deaths, whereas, the city's neighbouring districts also saw a spike in a number of persons testing positive
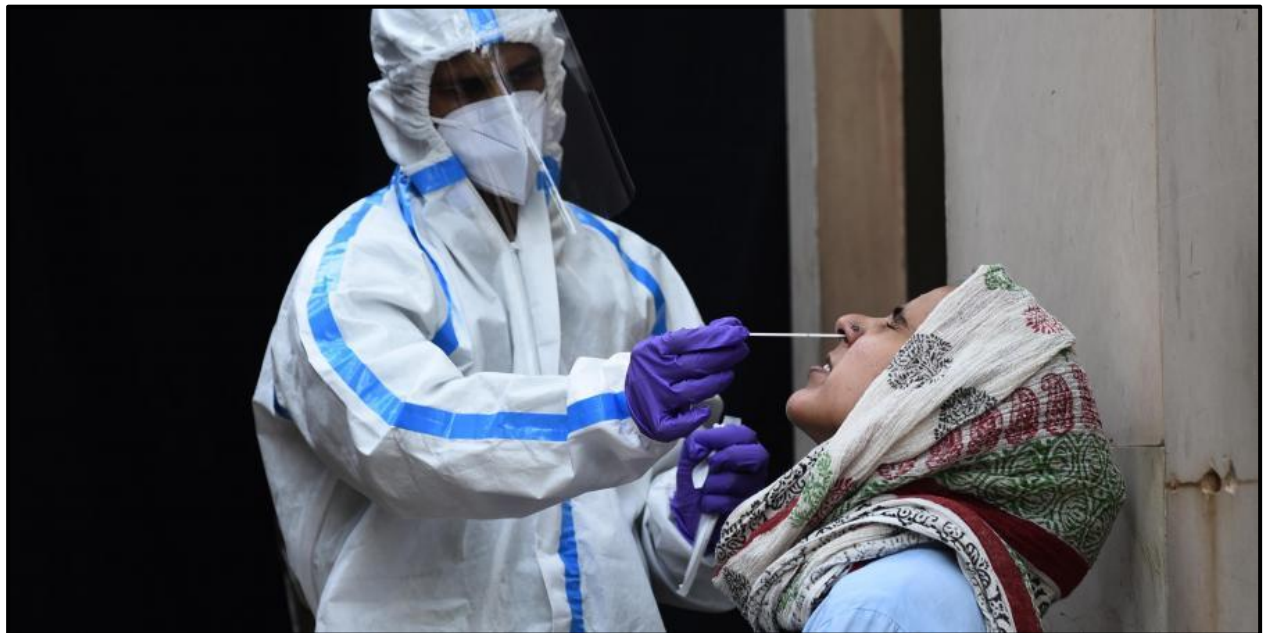
A healthcare worker wearing Personal Protective Equipment takes a swab of a woman to test for the coronavirus COVID-19

CHENNAI: After a slight fall in the number of COVID-19 positives, Tamil Nadu on Sunday recorded 4,244 new cases and 68 deaths, taking the tally to 1,38,470 and toll 1,966.

Chennai alone recorded 1,168 cases and 32 deaths, whereas, the city's neighbouring districts also saw a spike in a number of persons testing positive with 245 cases in Chengalpattu, 385 in Kancheepuram and 232 in Tiruvallur.

Though the share of new cases in Chennai has come down compared to a trend seen till last month, they went up in other districts. All the districts have reported new cases on Sunday. Meanwhile, the state tested 42,531 samples and 41,325 persons.

According to a bulletin issued by the Directorate of Public Health, Coimbatore reported 117 cases, Kanyakumari 104, Madurai 319, Theni 115, Tiruvannamalai 151, Thoothukudi 136, Tirunelveli 131, Trichy 103, Vellore 151 and Virudhunagar 246.

The State has 46,696 active cases including people under home isolation. Health Minister C Vijayabaskar in a press release said, finger pulse oximeters to monitor the oxygen level in blood in Covid-19 patients are being procured in large numbers as ordered by the Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami.

"Through Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation, orders were issued for 43,000 finger pulse oximeters. Till now 23,000 were received and remaining will be procured in one or two days. The oximeters will be used in monitoring asymptomatic people in home isolation, fever camps, COVID Care Centres, and also Covid-19 treatment hospitals," the minister said.

Of the 68 deaths recorded on Sunday, eight didn't have comorbidities. The state now has 105 testing centres, 53 in government and 52 in private. Three more private labs in Trichy were approved by ICMR, Neuberg Ehrlich Laboratory, GVN Hospital Private Ltd, and Magnum Imaging and Diagnostics.

7.6 COVID-19: Meghalaya to close all entry points to state from July 24-31

Source: newindianexpress.com,16 July,2020

The entry points of Byrnihat, Ratacherra, Bajengdoba, Tikrikilla, Mirjumla and Hallidayganj will be shut during the period.

SHILLONG: The Meghalaya government has decided to close all entry points to the state from July 24 to 31 to intensify COVID-19 surveillance, as its caseload rose to 354 on Thursday with 16 more security personnel testing positive for the infection, officials said.

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said only people engaged in essential services will be permitted to enter the state during the period.

Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma

"To reduce the burden on our health workers and administration engaged in intensive surveillance for the past four months, the state government has decided to close all the entry points to the state from July 24 to 31," he said.

The entry points of Byrnihat, Ratacherra, Bajengdoba, Tikrikilla, Mirjumla and Hallidayganj will be shut during the period.

They will be reopened on August 1, Sangma said, adding that the one at Byrnihat will be shifted to a new location to ensure smooth movement of traffic.

The state government has also decided not to allow wedding receptions in the districts of East Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi for the time being, he said.

"Only solemnisation of marriages in places of worship will be permitted, with strict adherence to social distancing norms," the chief minister said.

The decision in this regard comes after 10 of the 41 people who had attended a wedding reception tested positive for COVID-19.

As many as 200 primary contacts of the patients were identified and isolated during a two-day lockdown imposed in Shillong.

The 16 fresh cases registered in the past 24 hours include nine Army and four Assam Rifles jawans, and three Border Security Force (BSF) personnel, Director of Health Services, Aman War, said.

The fresh infections have taken the number of active cases in the state to 305, while two patients have died, he said.

A BSF personnel has recovered from COVID-19, taking the total number of persons cured of the disease to 47, War added.

7.7 Odisha Assembly sealed till July 31 after staffers test positive for Covid-19

Source:newindianexpress.com,24 July,2020

Odisha Assembly

Speaker Surjya Narayan Patro took the decision after five Assembly employees tested positive for coronavirus.

BHUBANESWAR: Odisha Assembly premises will remain shut till July 31 after some employees tested Covid-19 positive.

Announcing the decision, Speaker Surjya Narayan Patro said that after MLA Sukanta Nayak was infected with Covid-19, swab samples of all employees were collected for testing. Out of them, five have tested positive, he said.

Nayak had attended a standing committee meeting of Assembly in the first week of July. However, all other MLAs, who attended the meeting, have tested negative.

Meanwhile, Polsara MLA Srikant Sahu has tested positive. With this, four MLAs have so far tested positive.

The State Forest Headquarters - Aranya Bhawan - has also been sealed temporarily for disinfection after two forest officials tested positive for Covid-19.

"A Divisional Forest Officer who tested positive three days ago had visited the headquarters after his new posting last week. Subsequently, another staffer from the office tested positive. To prevent the spread of the virus further, the office has been sealed temporarily. It is likely to be reopened after sanitisation on Monday," said a senior wildlife officer.

He said around eight to 10 officials and staffers, including some in the rank of Additional PCCF, have been put in home quarantine for coming in contact with the patients.

The issue has now put the forest officials a fix as the office work had already been affected after the government asked offices to work with half of their strength with all social distancing measures in place to keep the spread of the virus in check.

BMC officials dealing with the contact tracing of Covid patients couldn't be reached for their comments.

7.8 To hike Covid-19 testing, PM Modi to launch 3 new labs at Noida, Mumbai and Kolkata

Source: hindustantimes.com,26 July,2020

These facilities will increase testing capacity in the country and help in strengthening the health infrastructure by early detection and treatment of Covid-19 patients. In the long run, these facilities will help in curbing the spread of the pandemic.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch 'high throughput Covid-19 testing facilities' on July 27 via video conferencing , the PMO said in a statement on Sunday. PM Modi will inaugurate the facilities at the ICMR-National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research based in Noida,

the ICMR-National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health located in Mumbai and in Kolkata's ICMR-National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday reiterated the importance of wearing masks and social distancing and urged the country to fight the battle against coronavirus with "full awareness and vigilance"

These facilities will increase testing capacity in the country and help in strengthening the health infrastructure by early detection and treatment of Covid-19 patients. In the long run, these facilities will help in curbing the spread of the pandemic, the statement said.

The Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare and Science and Technology, along with the three Chief Ministers of Maharashtra— Uddhav Thackeray, West Bengal—Mamata Banerjee and Uttar Pradesh—Yogi Adityanath will attend the virtual launch.

The Prime Minister on Sunday reiterated the importance of wearing masks and social distancing and urged the country to fight the battle against coronavirus with "full awareness and vigilance". The Prime Minister was addressing the nation through his radio programme called Mann ki Baat. He also referred to the country's increased testing and the national recovery rate which has been steadily rising and is currently at 63.54%.

A day earlier, India on Saturday tested a record number of 4, 20,000 samples in a single day, to detect the coronavirus infection among the population. This is the first time that the

country has carried out tests on such a large number of samples in 24 hours since Friday morning, the Union health ministry's Covid-19 data revealed.

With 4,20,898 samples tested in the last 24 hours, the Tests Per Million (TPM) has increased to 11,485 and the total testing capacity has climbed to 1,58,49,068.

"These three high-throughput testing facilities have been set up strategically at ICMR-National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research, Noida; ICMR-National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health, Mumbai; and ICMR-National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases, Kolkata, and will be able to test over 10,000 samples in a day," it statement read.

The new facilities will also reduce turn-around-time and exposure of lab personnel to infectious clinical materials. The laboratories will also be equipped to test for diseases other than Covid-19 as well and after the pandemic has subsided, will be able to test for Hepatitis-B and C, HIV, Mycobacterium tuberculosis, Cytomegalovirus, Chlamydia, Neisseria and Dengue.

India reported a spike of 48,661 coronavirus cases and 705 deaths in the last 24 hours, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Sunday.

7.9 Maharashtra doubles Covid testing in July as it looks to cut record positivity, death rates

Source: theprint.in,29 July ,2020

Maharashtra govt ramped up testing to nearly 20 lakh in less than a month by giving district officials targets and democratising the regime under a single department.

Mumbai: Maharashtra added over two lakh Covid-19 positive cases to its cumulative tally in July, but it also significantly ramped up its testing this month, almost doubling the total number of tests conducted so far.

As of 28 July, Maharashtra conducted 19.72 lakh Covid tests, a 98 per cent rise from 1 July, when the total number of tests was at 9.95 lakh, according to data from the Maharashtra medical education and drugs department.

Maharashtra has so far recorded 3,83,723 Covid positive cases, of which 1,47,592 are active.

Medics walk past a swab testing cabin at Podar hospital in Worli

"Till the end of June, testing was lacklustre across the state. While our department was responsible for setting up the testing infrastructure, the responsibility for actual testing was with another department," a senior official from the state medical education and drugs department said.

"The state government then decided to bring both these aspects of testing under one umbrella, making our department solely responsible for the number of tests too," said the official who didn't wish to be named.

"Contact tracing was not rigorous. The testing per case was very low. Major centres such as Mumbai and Pune too were testing under 3,500 a day. We realised that the officials in charge were not ramping up testing fearing it will lead to a spike in numbers and they will be blamed for it," the official said. "End of June, we started fixing these hiccups in testing."

Currently, Maharashtra has a fatality rate of 3.62 per cent, higher than the country's average of 2.25 per cent. It also has the country's highest positivity rate at 20.04 per cent, higher than the national average of 11.59 per cent.

Democratising tests, setting targets

The state government gave district officials certain targets to increase testing. For every positive case detected, officials were asked to test at least 10 individuals.

"Districts that were barely testing, such as those in the Vidarbha region, have now started testing at least 6-7 persons per positive case," the medical education department official said.

"We also assured the local district health officers and urban civil surgeons that they will not be hanged for a surge in cases due to higher testing, which was one of their main concerns," he said, adding at the same time collectors were told to plan quarantine and Covid care facilities better. Meanwhile, the state also took steps to open up testing. In a circular on 23 June, it first allowed all hospitals, whether government, semi government, private or charitable, to conduct rapid antigen tests and antibody tests on any patient as required.

In another circular dated 6 July, the government permitted private establishments to conduct Covid testing for their employees, provided the minimum number of people being tested is 50. The state government also decided to do away with the requirement of doctors' prescriptions for Covid testing, further democratising tests. "The state government is helping district collectors procure rapid antigen tests, while civic corporations have been asked to procure their own test kits," the official said.

Testing in Maharashtra close to peak capacity

Places such as Mumbai, Pune, Thane, Aurangabad and Vidarbha districts such as Nagpur and Yavatmal have rapidly boosted testing over the past month. The total tests in Mumbai increased by 45 per cent in July — from 3.33 lakh on 30 June to 4.85 lakh as of 27 July. In the Pune district, 4.57 lakh persons had been tested for Covid as of 27 July, with about 1.16 lakh tests done in the past four weeks itself, an official from the district said.

District Collector Naval Kishore Ram tweeted Tuesday, "Testing, tracing and CFR (Case Fatality Rate). We are assessed on 3 main indicators. We have tested 457608 samples till date . More than 10 persons are being traced against one positive person."Similarly, Vidarbha districts, which initially had very few cases and low testing, have also started testing more since the past month. Testing in the Yavatmal district grew phenomenally to 13,407 as of 27 July, from just 4,950 on 1 July, according to the district's records. In the Nagpur district too, the number of tests increased to 66,176 as of 27 July from 24,206 as of 29 June. State government records show Maharashtra has 133 viral diagnostic laboratories, with one RT-PCR test lab in almost every district, and the state's peak testing capacity is 58,600. The testing in Maharashtra is currently about 40,000, with the one-day testing on 27 July being 44,013.

"With improved testing, we are also hoping to reduce the mortality rate as more cases are detected right at the outset than on the fourth or fifth day as the case earlier was," said another state government official.

AUGUST 2020

8.1 WHO suggests Ahmedabd COVID-19 measures as case study: Gujarat Government

Source:newindianexpress.com,1 August,2020

A healthcare worker wearing a PPE kit takes a sample of a woman for COVID-19 test at a residential area in Ahmedabad Wednesday July 8 2020

AHMEDABAD: The World Health Organisation (WHO) has appreciated the management of COVID-19 in Gujarat's Ahmedabad and suggested to take up various measures being implemented in the city as a case study for rest of India and other countries, the state government said on Saturday.

WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan has appreciated the COVID-19 management in Ahmedabad, it said.

The WHO has suggested to take up initiatives in Ahmedabad like 'Dhanvantari Rath', 104 fever helpline, Sanjivani Van; and active participation of private hospitals in control and treatment as a case study for other cities in India and abroad, it said.

Meanwhile, Gujarat has also steadily ramped up testing for COVID-19 diagnosis from 64,007 in April to 3,91,114 in July, which the government said is thrice the rate suggested by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The patient recovery rate in Gujarat has improved to 73.09 per cent, "which is much higher than other states", while the COVID-19 mortality rate has declined to 3.97 per cent, an official release said.

The government under Chief Minister Vijay Rupani has been working on the formula of "testing, tracking and treatment" ever since the first COVID-19 case was detected in Gujarat on March 19, 2020, it said.

The number of tests for coronavirus has increased steadily.

At the rate of 410.83 tests per day per million tests as on July 31, the government has achieved a rate that is nearly thrice the rate of 140 suggested by the ICMR, it said.

Till July 31, Gujarat had tested a total 7,64,777 samples including 3,91,114 in July, which is the highest in a month since the outbreak of the virus on March 19, the release said.

A total of 64,007 samples were tested in April, 1,47,923 in May, and 1,61,733 in June, it said.

"The patient recovery rate in Gujarat is much higher than other states at 73.09 per cent while the death rate has dropped to 3.97 per cent," the release said.

The CM has suggested house-to-house health check-up be made available in cities through municipal authorities to detect infected patients, it said.

As of July 31, Ahmedabad district contributed 26,517 COVID-19 cases in the total count of over 61,000 in Gujarat, as per health department.

8.2 India's service sector activity still severely restricted by COVID-19; contracts for 5th month in July

Source: newindianexpress.com,5 August,2020

Looking ahead, the 12-month outlook for output was negative for a third successive month, with fears of a substantial economic downturn common among survey respondents.

NEW DELHI: India's services sector activity remained in deep slump in July as coronavirus-induced restrictions stifled demand and forced companies to cease operations and further reduce staff numbers, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

The IHS Markit India Services Business Activity Index stood at 34.2 in July, slightly higher than 33.7 in June. Despite the rise, the Indian services sector activity contracted for the fifth successive month in July.

A print above 50 means expansion and a score below that denotes contraction, as per the IHS Markit India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).

"With such a prolonged and significant downturn, any substantial recovery will take many months, if not years.

Latest IHS Markit estimates point to an annual contraction in GDP of over 6 per cent in the year ending March 2021," said Lewis Cooper, Economist at IHS Markit.

Survey respondents linked falls in both activity and order books to the adverse impact stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, with frequent mentions of lockdown measures, weak demand conditions and the temporary suspension of company operations.

"The coronavirus pandemic and subsequent introduction of lockdown measures continued to weigh heavily on the Indian service sector in July.

Business activity and new orders dropped again, with the rates of decline remaining rapid overall," Cooper stated.

With overall demand conditions severely muted, service providers made further job cuts in July.

The rate of job shedding was the fastest on record, with panellists blaming weak client demand and temporary business closures "July data, as a whole, provide no real signs that the downturn is slowing down.

That's not surprising with lockdown measures still in force, but undoubtedly these will have to be loosened and companies reopen before the sector can move towards stabilisation," Cooper said.

Looking ahead, the 12-month outlook for output was negative for a third successive month, with fears of a substantial economic downturn common among survey respondents.

The Composite PMI Output Index, which measures combined services and manufacturing output, fell from 37.8 in June to 37.2 in July, signalling a further rapid contraction in private sector business activity in July.

Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Tuesday started its three-day brainstorming on the bi-monthly monetary policy meet. The six-member committee will announce its decision on August 6.

8.3 India's Covid tally in August highest in world so far

Source: timesofindia.indiatimes.com,8 August,2020

NEW DELHI: India is emerging as the biggest Covid-19 hotspot in the world in August. The country has so far recorded the most number of fresh cases this month, slightly more than the US and substantially higher than infections reported in Brazil. India has the world's third highest death toll from the virus in the first six days of August.

The pandemic continued to surge on Friday, with fresh infections in the country crossing 60,000 for the second straight day and fatalities shooting up to 926, the highest single-day toll so far, as per data collated from state governments.

India reported 3,28,903 new coronavirus cases in the first six days of August. The corresponding figure in the US was 3,26,111 and in Brazil 2,51,264, according to worldometers.info.

India's daily cases have been the highest in the world on four of the six days of this month — August 2, 3, 5 and 6. India's caseload crossed the 2 million (20 lakh) mark on Thursday, with the fastest rise in cases from 1 million to 2 million among the three countries that have reached the grim milestone so far. India's infection growth rate of 3.1% was also higher than the US and Brazil at the 2 million stage.

In deaths, however, Brazil and the US have both registered more than 6,000 fatalities so far in August while India's count is 5,075.

On Friday, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh continued to register above 10,000 fresh infections. At least five states reported their highest single-day spike in cases — Bihar (3,646 new cases), Telangana (2,207), Odisha (1,833), Punjab (1,063) and Manipur (249).

For the third day in a row, Maharashtra added over 10,000 cases and reported over 300 Covid-19 deaths on Friday. The state added 10,483 new Covid-19 cases and reported 300 deaths, taking the total cases to 4,90,262, very close to the 5-lakh mark while the total fatalities were at 17,092, breaching the 17,000-mark. Mumbai's share in the state's daily addition was 8.2% on Friday as for the second consecutive day the city reported below 1,000 cases at 862. Friday's addition is the lowest in the last 10 days, underlining the city's "stable" Covid curve.

Andhra Pradesh on Friday reported the highest single-day toll of 89 deaths and 10,171 fresh Covid-19 cases, also becoming the third state in the country to soar past the two-lakh caseload. The cumulative tally of the state stood at 2,06,960 cases behind Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the two states having clocked the two-lakh coronavirus cases mark long ago. The state's death toll also jumped to 1,842.

Andhra Pradesh breached the one-lakh mark on July 27, nearly 135 days after the state reported its first case on March 12. But it took only 11 days for the state to add the next one lakh cases.

The number of fresh Covid-19 cases in Chennai fell below 1,000 for the first time in 52 days on Friday while Tamil Nadu recorded its highest toll with 119 deaths. Chennai had 984 of the 5,880 fresh cases in the state, which pushed up the case tally to 2,85,024. The cumulative death toll was 4,690. Active cases stood at 52,759.

8.4 Lockdown, containment zones no use as states slipping on COVID-19 growth rate, doubling time

Source: newindianexpress.com,10 August,2020

Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Tripura fared badly in July despite going for shutdowns.

NEW DELHI: Lockdowns and containment zones in at least a dozen states haven't made a substantial difference in the fight against Covid-19.

Health workers prepare for COVID- 19 testing through rapid antigen methodology at a neighborhood in New Delhi on Friday

An analysis of data shows that these states are slipping on three distinct parameters — growth rate (the rate at which infections grow), doubling time (the time for the total infections to double) and positivity rate (percentage of people, out of the number of people tested, who are found positive) — during Unlock 2.0 in July.

Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Tripura fared badly in July despite imposing either a complete, partial or mini shutdowns.

Rajasthan, Punjab, Chandigarh are the other regions which did badly during Unlock 2.

Public health expert and epidemiologist Jammi N Rao said: "Lockdown delays the spread of the infection. At some point, we will have to unlock and unless we have put in place the means to inhibit the person-to-person spread, the epidemic will resume."

Oomen John, a public health specialist at The George Institute for Global Health, pointed out that every positive case needs a strong response.

HOW CASES UNFOLDED

STATES	CONFIRMED CASES	ACTIVE CASES	DIFFERENCE*
A&N ISLANDS			▲ 560%
ARUNACHAL PRADESH			▲ 423.43%
ANDHRA PRADESH			▲ 818.3%
ASSAM			▲ 182%
BIHAR			▲ 652.56%
CHANDIGARH			▲ 385.52%
CHHATTISGARH			▲ 346.69%
DELHI			▼ 61%
D&N HAVELI			▲ 281%
GOA			▲ 134.22%
GUJARAT			▲ 81.77%
HIMACHAL PRADESH			▲ 231%
HARYANA			▲ 55.43%
JHARKHAND			▲ 1110.65%
J&K			▲ 177.91%
KARNATAKA			▲ 673.23%
KERALA			▲ 388%
LADAKH			▲ 33.53%
MAHARASHTRA			▲ 187.31%
MEGHALAYA			▲ 4207%
MANIPUR			▲ 36%
MADHYA PRADESH			▲ 230%
MIZORAM	■ JULY 1	■ JULY 1	▲ 344.44%
NAGALAND	■ JULY 31	■ JULY 31	▲ 203%
ODISHA			▲ 452.82%
PUNJAB			▲ 232.60%
PUDUCHERRY			▲ 213.5%
RAJASTHAN			▲ 254.64%
SIKKIM			▲ 1030.55%
TELANGANA			▲ 81.9%
TAMIL NADU			▲ 41.98%
TRIPURA			▲ 419%
UTTAR PRADESH			▲ 421.3%
UTTARAKHAND			▲ 434.5%
WEST BENGAL			▲ 228.61%

Source: covid19india.org   0 50000 100000 150000 200000 250000   0 50000 100000 150000   *Active Cases (July 1-31)

"Some states have ramped up testing while they have also gone for a very strong in-person contact tracing, isolation, containing the points of infection," said John.

Epidemiologist Giridhara R Babu attributes higher infection levels to large population density with poor testing and public health measures. Here's how five states fared in July:

Andhra Pradesh (14-day complete lockdown in some places from July 18)

The state has the second highest number of active cases in the country and is placed third in terms of total Covid-19 infections by July 31.

The virus has spread to all 13 districts of the state, reveals data.

While the government ramped up testing by about 111% by July-end, a steady eightfold increase in the tally of active cases by July 31 as compared to July 1 shows the efforts did not yield dividends.

In July, the growth rate climbed to 7.42% — among the highest in the country — from 4.69% in June and the doubling time in July decreased from June's 14.9 days to 9.43 days — the second worst doubling rate in the country.

Karnataka
(Capital Bengaluru and both urban & rural districts were put under lockdown for nine days —- July 14-July 22)

In the all-India tally of both active and new cases in June, Karnataka remained on the seventh position, but by July-end, the state had the third highest active cases.

In the tally of total infections too, Karnataka climbed to the fifth position. While the tally of daily cases remained under 1,000 for all of June except two days, June 28 and June 29, in July, the state started with a new record almost every other day.

From a total of 16,514 cases on July 1, the state ended with 1,24,115 cases. Following the lockdown, Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa said lockdowns were not effective.

UttarPradesh
(Weekend lockdowns from July 10)

The country's most populous state went from bad to worse in July and saw an increase in the growth percentage of Covid-19 from 3.50% in June to 4.16% in July.

The doubling time decreased from 20 days in June to 16.82 days in July. The positivity rate increased from 1.81% on July 1 to 3.82% on July 31.

The northern state also climbed three positions up in the all-India tally of active cases despite introducing weekend lockdowns.

WestBengal
(Under partial lockdown since July 23)

The state ranked ninth in the tally of active cases in June, but moved upwards to the sixth position in July owing to a higher growth and positivity rates.

While the state recorded 19,170 cases on July 1, by the end of the month, it recorded 70,188 cases, registering a growth rate in July at 4.26% compared to June's 3.96%.

There was a two-fold increase in the number of active cases. However, the state managed to improve its doubling time significantly from 1.67 days in June to 16.43 in July.

Bihar
(Under complete lockdown since July 16)

Bihar was nowhere near the list of 10 most affected states in June, by July-end, it found itself on 10th position with a total 50,987 cases and at the seventh position in the tally of active cases with 17,038 cases, recording a six-fold increase from July 1 when the state had only 2,320 active cases and 10,204 infections.

The growth percentage of infections surged to 5.31% in July from 3.14% in June.

The doubling rate reduced from June's 22 days to 13 days in July. With a spike in the number of cases, Bihar decided to impose a state-wide lockdown. CM Nitish Kumar recently said the state was at threat due to high population density.

8.5 Covid-19 Factoid: India sees record recovery in Aug, but not yet in safe zone

Source: business-standard.com,13 August,2020

Among top five countries with the highest number of cases, India's recovery rate is the second-lowest

The global confirmed case for the coronavirus tally currently stands at 20.5 million, of which 6.3 million cases are active at present. There have been around 13.4 million recoveries globally, while fatalities have risen to 747,003. There are three countries with over 2 million cases each: the US, Brazil and India.

India has 643,948 active cases at present, roughly 27 per cent of the confirmed case count. There have been 1,639,599 recoveries in the country, while 46,091 patients have lost their lives. Two states--Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu--have more than 300,000 confirmed cases each.

Here are some data points on the pandemic:

1. India's recovery rate crosses the 70 per cent mark

In some positive news, 70 per cent of all reported coronavirus cases in India have now recovered. The steepest rise in the recovery rate has been in the month of August, with the recovery rate gaining almost six percentage points in just 12 days. However, among the top five countries with the highest number of cases, India's recovery rate is the second-lowest, after the US.
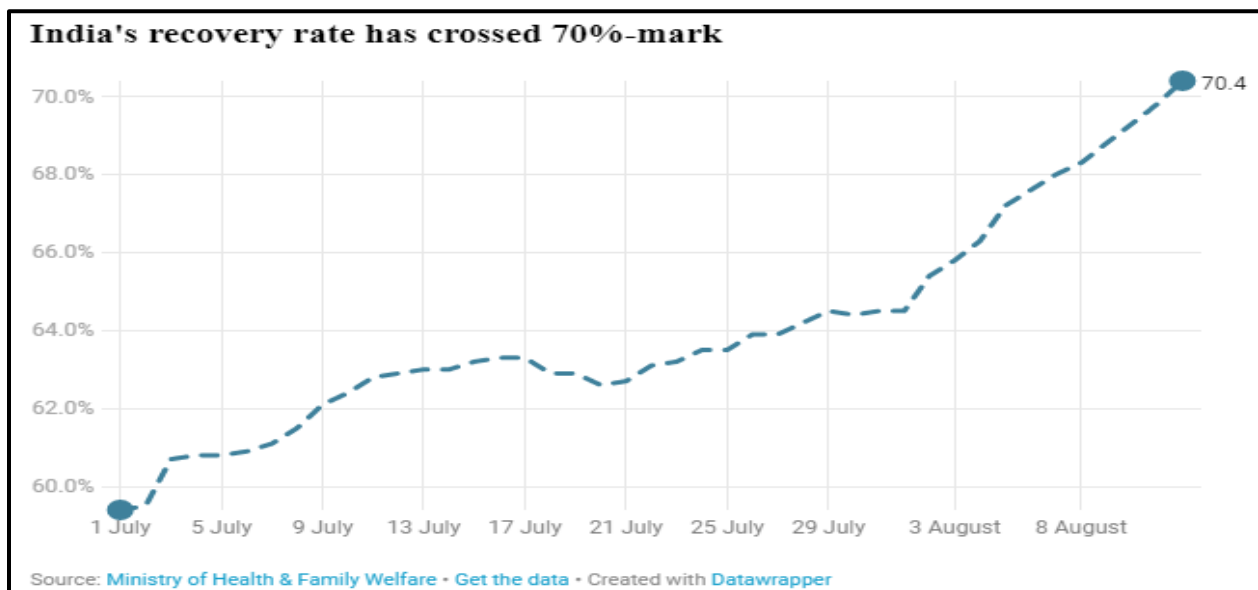
2. West Bengal enters the 100,000-reported cases club

West Bengal is now the sixth state in India to have more than 100,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus. In the past 25 days, the state has reported more than 2,000 fresh cases every single day, with the highest single-day spike reported on August 7 at 2,954 cases. Roughly 25 per cent of all cases in West Bengal are active. The state's death toll stands at over 2,000.

West Bengal has added over 2,000 cases daily in last 25 days, becomes 6th state to cross 100,000 cases-mark

- Daily new cases
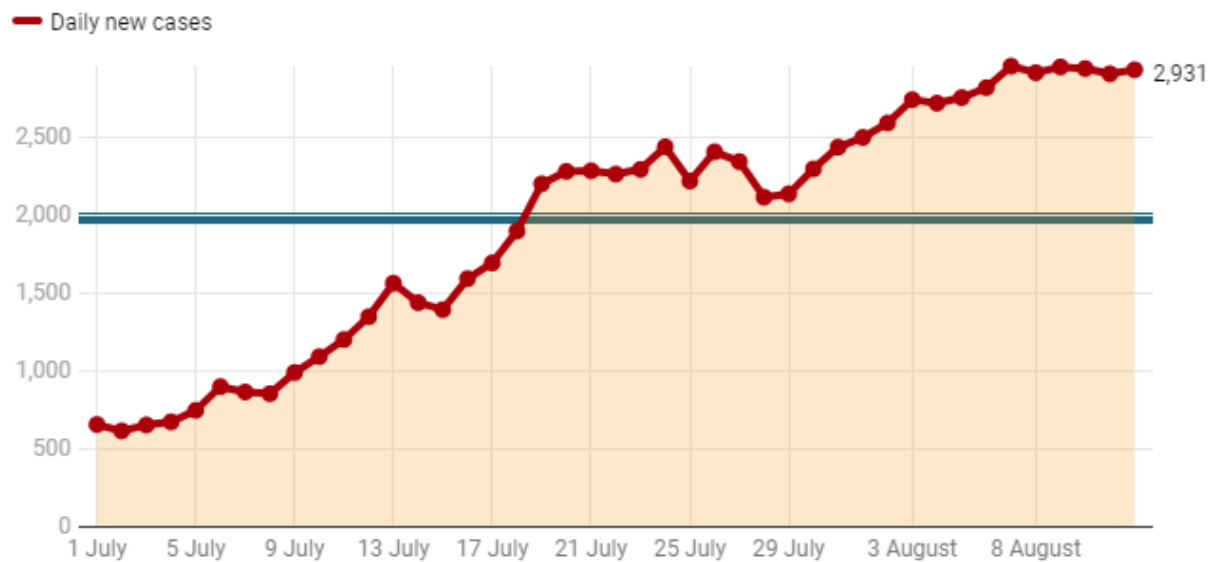
Get the data · Created with Datawrapper

3. Maharashtra's test positivity rate continues to remain high

Maharashtra, which has the highest confirmed case count as well as the number of fatalities in the country, also has the highest test positivity rate, indicating the tally could be much worse when the testing rates are ramped up. At 18.4 per cent, it is twice as much as the national average of 9 per cent. Maharashtra is followed by Telangana and Puducherry.

Maharashtra has the highest test positivity ratio among all India states
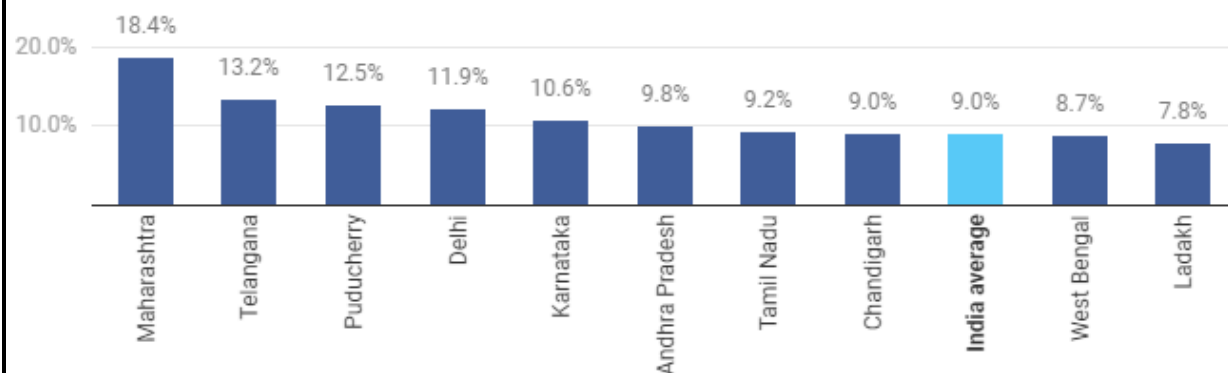
Get the data · Created with Datawrapper

8.6 Number of COVID-19 tests in Delhi goes down in August; officials attribute it to improved situation

Source: firstpost.com,17 August,2020

New Delhi: The number of coronavirus tests in Delhi has gone down in August as compared to July, with the government attributing it to the decrease in COVID-19 infections in the national capital.

The authorities conducted over 2.58 lakh COVID-19 tests in Delhi between August 1 and 15, whereas the figure stood at over 3.13 lakh in the same period in July.

Between 16 and 31 July, over 2.96 lakh tests were conducted in Delhi.

"It is wrong to say that the number of tests in Delhi has dipped in the last few days. We are doing sufficient number of tests in Delhi. There can be fluctuations over short time periods, but overall we have been consistently doing 19,000-20,000 tests daily for months now," an official said.

The official said the number of tests was low on some days in August due to festival and celebrations like Rakshabandhan, Janmashtami, Eid al-Adha and Independence Day.

According to the official, people do not go out for COVID-19 test during festivals unless and until it is absolutely necessary. Also, testing is lower on Saturdays and Sundays.

The tests in Delhi are being conducted strictly as per Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines, the official added.

August 1 saw over 18,000 tests being conducted, while the figures on subsequent days -- August 2 (12,730), August 3 (10,133) and August 4 (9,295) were significantly lower than the average number of tests being conducted on a daily basis, which is 20,000.

The numbers picked up later and on August 5 there were over 16,000 tests. Between August 6 and August 9, the number of tests exceeded 20,000 per day with August 8 seeing 24,592 tests being conducted, the highest for the first 16 days of August.

Testing was ramped up in Delhi in the month of June with the government introducing rapid antigen tests from June 18.

Between 1 and 12 July, the national capital saw over 9000 RT-PCR tests being conducted daily with July 6 and July 7 being the only two days when the number of RT-PCR tests was below the 9,000 mark.

In fact, on 2 July, the number of RT-PCR tests (10,978) exceeded the number of rapid antigen tests.

Explaining the testing module, the official said that RTPCR test facility is readily available at all flu clinics, labs and in all hospitals.

Anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus can visit any of these centres and easily get an RTPCR test done, the official said.

"There has not been a single complaint about anyone being unable to get RTPCR test done. Earlier, when the cases were high more people were visiting these centers to get themselves tested. Now since the number of cases has significantly dipped in Delhi, the number of RTPCR tests has also fallen down accordingly," the official stressed.

Whereas in the case of antigen tests, the government is going to the people with antigen kits for testing them, the official added.

The government has created testing facilities within localities, schools, dispensaries, etc. where it is encouraging people to get the rapid test done, she said.

The ICMR protocol mandates rapid tests to be done within smaller localities. This is a uniform protocol followed not only by Delhi but also by all the states.

8.7 29% of Delhi has antibodies for Covid-19: Second sero-survey

Source: hindustantimes.com,20 August,2020

The findings of the second survey show that the prevalence of antibodies among the people has increased by over 6 percentage points when compared to the first survey held between June 27 and July 10.

A medical worker collects a blood sample for the second serological survey sampling in early August in New Delhi

The second serological survey conducted in Delhi between August 1 and 7 has found that 29.1% of the city's population has developed antibodies against the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), state health minister Satyendar Jain said on Thursday. The survey results also showed the prevalence of antibodies among women was more (32.2%) compared to men (28.3%).

The findings of the second survey show that the prevalence of antibodies among the people has increased by over 6 percentage points when compared to the first survey held between June 27 and July 10. As many as 22.86% of people were earlier found to have developed antibodies against Sars-CoV-2 that causes Covid-19. In the first survey, samples were collected from 21,387 people, whereas, in the second round, 15,000 samples were

collected. Jain said the third round of the survey will begin from September 1 and would go on for a similar duration as earlier.

According to the second survey, prevalence of antibodies among those aged less than 18 was 34.7%, and 28.5% for those between 18-50. For those above 50, it was 31.2%.

Government officials said the latest findings that those aged under 18 were found to have the maximum antibodies compared to other age groups would play a crucial role in the Delhi government's decisions on opening schools and colleges. Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, in his Independence Day speech on August 15, said that the government will not open schools until it is fully convinced about the city's Covid-19 situation.

Giving the district-wise break-up, the health minister said the southeast district has seen the biggest increase in people developing antibodies. The lowest increase was seen in northeast Delhi, which once had the highest number of Covid-19 cases.

Developing antibodies means a person contracted Covid-19, recovered, and subsequently developed them against the disease. "Antibodies are found in high numbers anywhere between 3 and 8 months since the recovery of a Covid-19 patient. In the process, the person also develops T-cells because of which the chances of contracting Covid-19 again become extremely low," Jain said.

The report showed the southeast district has seen a maximum increase in the prevalence of antibodies among people when compared with the findings of the first and the second surveys. It was earlier 22.12% and this time it was found to be 33.2%. This is followed by the south district--from 18.61% to 27.2%. But, after the southeast district, the areas with the highest prevalence of antibodies among people are north district (31.6%), followed by central district (31.4%).

In the southwest district, 16.3% of the people have been found to have developed antibodies, which is the lowest of all the 11 districts in Delhi. The second-lowest was the New Delhi district (24.6%).

A day after the high court directed the Delhi government to do a comparative analysis of the two serological surveys conducted in Delhi so far, the health minister on Thursday said that the government would do the same.

When asked about a possible second wave, Jain said, "We had expected that in the second sero survey the seroprevalence would increase considerably. But it has increased by around 6-7% since July. So, Delhi is heading towards herd immunity, but experts say that should be at least 40%. We cannot rule out a second wave because only yesterday India saw the highest ever spike in daily fresh Covid-19 cases."

Jain said Delhi has a population of around 20 million and the findings of the latest survey suggest that around 5.9 million have contracted the Sars-Cov-2 virus and recovered from the disease. "It is relieving to know that around 29% of the city's population has recovered after being infected by the coronavirus. On the other hand, 71% of people in Delhi have not developed antibodies, which means that they are still vulnerable," he said. "The people of Delhi are being very careful in taking precautions against Covid-19. So, this is a very positive development. It shows that the Covid-19 infection numbers are no longer rising exponentially in Delhi."

Jain said there was a time when the cases in Delhi were increasing by 4,000 daily and the positivity ratio was 30%. "It is also reassuring to see that the positivity rate in Delhi has reduced to nearly 7%, which is much lower than the national average. The situation in Delhi is improving."

Charoo Hans, a former head of the microbiology department at Delhi's Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, said if 71% of people are still vulnerable, it is quite a high number. "It suggests that the government should continue with its efforts on aggressive testing, contact tracing, surveillance, isolation, and providing good treatment. It also suggests that people should continue ensuring strict compliance with social distancing, wearing masks, washing their hands frequently, and following respiratory etiquettes. There is no room for any complacency."

8.8 Amid spike in COVID-19 cases, weekend lockdown comes into force in Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh

Source: newindianexpress.com,22 August,2020

While in Punjab and Haryana, the COVID tally has reached 39,327 and 52,129 respectively, in Chandigarh, there are 2,631 cases so far.

CHANDIGARH: All shops except those dealing with essential items remained shut in Punjab, Haryana and UT Chandigarh with weekend lockdown restrictions coming into force on Saturday amid rising coronavirus cases.

The Punjab government had announced weekend lockdown in all cities and towns on Thursday, while authorities in Haryana and Chandigarh ordered the closure of all shops except those providing essential services on Friday to check the spread of COVID-19.

Punjab, Haryana and UT Chandigarh have come up with stricter restrictions in the wake of rising cases of the infection.

Streets wear deserted look during the complete lockdown in the wake of coronavirus pandemic at the entrance of Amritsar Aug 22 2020

While in Punjab and Haryana, the COVID tally has reached 39,327 and 52,129 respectively, in Chandigarh, there are 2,631 cases so far.

Shopkeepers who were dealing with non-essential commodities kept their shops shut in both states and their common capital Chandigarh.

Unlike on weekdays, a lesser number of people were visible on roads at most of the places on Saturday.

Policemen in adequate strength were also deployed in all the cities to ensure the implementation of weekend lockdown, officials said.

In Punjab's Phagwara, Ashok Kultham, president of Cloth Merchant Association, said all the shops will religiously follow the state government's lockdown guidelines.

"We have kept all our shops closed," he said.

A station house officer (city) in Phagwara Onkar Singh Brar claimed that the weekend lockdown was completely observed.

He said policemen were advising people to wear masks otherwise strict action would be taken against them.

The SHO said eight men were held and their three vehicles were impounded on Friday night for violating the night curfew.

In Hoshiarpur also, most of the markets wore a deserted look but shops of essential items like medicines, vegetables, milk, etc. remained open.

Hoshiarpur Deputy Commissioner Apneet Riyait has directed the officials concerned to ensure strict compliance of Section 144, prohibiting gathering of more than five persons.

Senior Superintendent of Police Navjot Singh Mahal said flag marches were being conducted at various places in Hoshiarpur.

In Ludhiana, general secretary of the Punjab Beopar Mandal Sunil Mehra welcomed the move of the government, saying such restrictions are required to curb the spread of COVID 19 which is already increasing at an alarming pace.

He, however, demanded that the lockdown should be imposed on days other than the weekend as restrictions on Saturdays and Sundays would affect trading activity in Ludhiana.

In Moga, a police official said that they had been issuing challans to people who were not wearing masks.

Besides weekend lockdown, the Punjab government had also announced to extend the night curfew by two hours from 7 pm till 5 am in all the cities.

In Punjab, shops and shopping malls would remain closed on Saturdays and Sundays but shops dealing with essential goods would remain open till 6.30 pm, as per the orders.

Only home delivery of food items has been allowed by restaurants, which could open till 6.30 pm on weekends.

Liquor shops in both Punjab and Haryana are allowed to remain open but in Chandigarh, such shops will remain closed during weekends.

8.9 Covid-19: As Delhi witnesses marginal rise in infections, Mumbai sees lowest daily count

Source: hindustantimes.com,26 August,2020

Delhi recorded 1,544 more Covid-19 cases and 17 deaths on Tuesday. It was the first time in over a month that the number of new infections crossed the 1,500-mark.

After witnessing a drop in Covid-19 cases in the past few weeks, infections in Delhi have started rising again

Delhi after reporting a slide in the number of coronavirus disease (Covid-19) cases has started to witness an uptick once again and there has been a dip in the infection tally in Mumbai, which once was the worst-hit city in the country, according to government data.

After witnessing a drop in Covid-19 cases in the past few weeks, infections in Delhi have started rising again. The Capital recorded 1,544 new Covid-19 cases and 17 deaths on Tuesday, the highest single-day increase in infections in the city in 40 days, according to official data.

Meanwhile, Mumbai saw the lowest daily count of Covid-19 cases on Tuesday as it recorded 587 fresh infections. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region that had been witnessing a surge in coronavirus disease cases, is showing a sign of recovery.

So far, India has recorded 3,234,474 Covid-19 cases, including 59,449 deaths. India reported its first Covid-19 fatality in mid-March and over 22,000 deaths have been recorded in August so far.

Fluctuating numbers

Delhi was the first major Covid-19 hotspot in the country to have successfully controlled the outbreak last month. On August 1, the city recorded 1,118 fresh cases while for the next three days, the number of infections reported in a single-day stayed below the 1,000-mark.

From August 5 to August 9, the number of fresh Covid-19 cases again stayed above the 1,000-mark only to come down to 707 on August 10. Three days between August 11 and August 22 saw less than 1,000 fresh cases being reported -- August 13 (956), August 16 (652), and August 17 (787).

Co-incidentally, the number of tests conducted on the days the capital recorded cases below 1,000 were below the average 20,000 tests which are being conducted on a daily basis, according to data.

There has been a steady increase in the positivity rate — the fraction of tests that return positive. Around 7.8% of tests came back positive for Covid-19 according to Tuesday's bulletin. This pushes the seven-day average of positivity rate to 7.5%, the highest since July 19, or 37 days ago.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, however, said on Wednesday the number of Covid-19 cases has marginally increased in the national capital, adding that the situation is under control.

Lowest daily count

Mumbai has been recording a significant dip in Covid-19 cases and fatalities for the last two days. With just 587 cases, Mumbai reported the lowest count in the last couple of months on Tuesday. There are 17,938 active Covid-19 cases in Mumbai now, according to a health official.

The total number of Covid-19 cases increased to 137,678 in the county's financial capital, including 17,931 active cases, 111,967 recovered cases and 7,474 deaths, said Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Moreover, Dharavi, which saw a rising number of infections, reported 12 new cases on Tuesday. With this, the number of cases in Asia's biggest sum area rose to 2,725 including 2,375 discharges and 90 active cases, the civic body added.

In the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, barring Navi Mumbai with 302 Covid-19 cases, all the other districts reported less than 300 cases. Mumbai's recovery rate was steady at 81% and the doubling rate increased to 88 days.

Meanwhile, with more than 10,000 fresh cases, Maharashtra's tally crossed seven lakh Covid-19 cases on Tuesday as its recovery rate continued to rise steadily.

8.10 Pandemic shocker! India's GDP shrinks by 23.9% in first quarter of FY2020-21

Source: indiatoday.in,31 August,2020

India's GDP has shrunk by 23.9. per cent in the first quarter of the financial year 2020-21.

Hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has shrunk by 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of the financial year 2020-21.

"GDP has shrunk from Rs 35.35 lakh crore in Q1 of 2019-20 to Rs 26.90 lakh crore in the first quarter of Q1 of 2020-21, showing a contraction of 23.9 per cent as compared to 5.2 per cent growth in Q1 2019-20," an official statement by the National Statistical Office (NSO) said on Monday.

In the corresponding quarter in the last financial year, the Indian economy had registered grown at a rate of 5 per cent. In the previous quarter, Q4 FY2019-20, India's GDP growth rate was 3.1 per cent.

The worst-hit sector in the first quarter of FY2020-21 was construction, which contracted by 50 per cent. The hotel industry contracted by 47 per cent, manufacturing by 39.3 per cent and mining by 23.3 per cent.

The only sector which managed to survive the slump was agriculture, which registered a growth of 3.4 per cent.

Covid-19 impact

The GDP growth data accounts for the months of April, May and June - when a strict national lockdown was in place in the country due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The nationwide lockdown was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24, 2020 for 21 days, which was followed by another for 19 days. The economy is believed to have suffered the most during the June quarter as a result of the nationwide lockdown.

India, which had one of the strictest Covid-19 lockdowns, also seems to have suffered the one the worst economic consequences. India's economic slump for the lockdown quarter is worse than the majority of the big global economies.

The UK's economy contracted by 20.4 per cent in Q1, while the Chinese economy grew by 3.2 per cent.
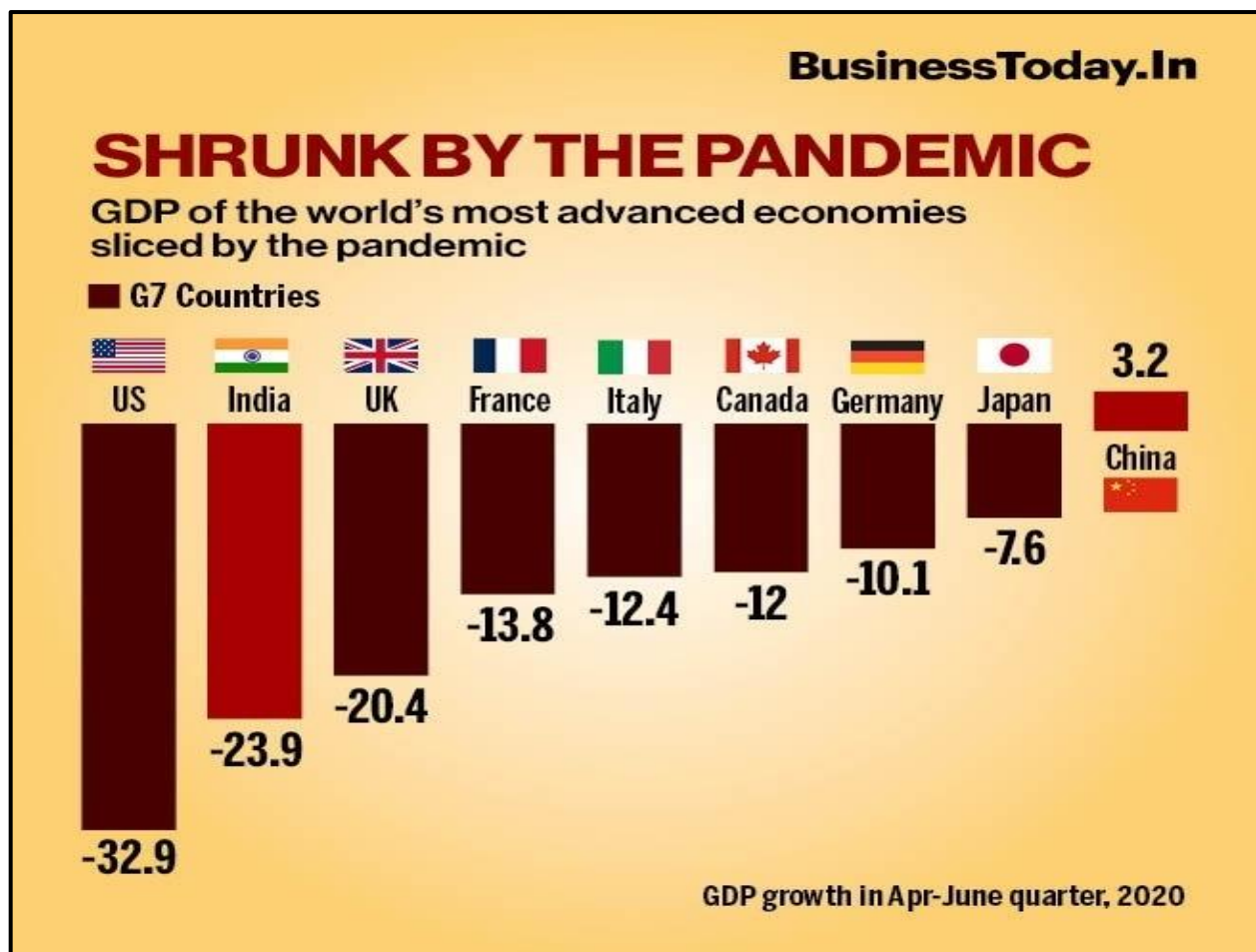
Worst financial slump since 1996

The year-on-year GDP contraction during the June quarter (Q1FY21) is India's worst growth performance since the country started reporting quarterly GDP data in 1996.

However, it is not unexpected. India Today TV analysis of predictions given by economists had indicated that the GDP growth will shrink by 15 per cent to 25 per cent.

Industry body FICCI's latest Economic Outlook Survey had pegged India's growth in first quarter of 2020-21 at -14.2 per cent and growth for overall financial year 2020-21 at -4.5 per cent.

Soumya Kanti Ghosh, Group Chief Economic Adviser at the State Bank of India had said that India's real GDP growth for Q1 FY21 would now be around -16.5 per cent.

State Bank of India expected India's GDP to contract 16.5 per cent in the April-June quarter from the earlier expected 20 per cent. In its earlier Ecowrap report in May, SBI had estimated Q1 FY21 GDP contraction at over 20 per cent.

Abheek Barua, Chief Economist at HDFC Bank, expected GDP growth to contract 21 per cent in June quarter compared to a growth of 3.1 per cent in the March quarter.

SEPTEMBER 2020

9.1 Covid-19: India's daily caseload nears China's grand total

Source: indiatoday.in,3 September,2020

China has reported 85,000 cases since the beginning of coronavirus outbreak in December last year. India reported near 84,000 Covid-19 cases on Thursday.

India reported nearly 84,000 fresh cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours ending on Thursday 8 am. This is the second consecutive day when India reported more than 80,000 cases in a day. In the past one week, India has reached its peak daily Covid-19 figures on four days.

India has been reporting the highest caseloads for Covid-19 since August in the world. The near-84,000 figure is close to the grand Covid-19 case tally of China, where the coronavirus pandemic outbreak took place.

China has till date reported 85,077 confirmed cases of Covid-19. What is worrying for India is that its daily caseloads are increasing and may surpass the Chinese grand total on any of the days over the next one week.

A woman puts a mask on her child's face to mitigate the chances of coronavirus infection

Except Mondays, the general trend for fresh 24-hour caseload in India has been northward for several weeks and more noticeable in August, when India became the biggest global hotspot of the coronavirus pandemic. India's confirmed Covid-19 cases more than doubled

since the beginning of August - from 17.5 lakh to over 38.5 lakh. Testing too has more than doubled during the period - from 2 crore to over 4.5 crore.

China and India -- particularly in the initial phase -- went for similar kind of lockdowns to contain the spread of Covid-19. But when China went for lockdown, India was yet to report its first case of Covid-19. And, by the time China got in the position to unlock in the second half of March, India was preparing itself for coronavirus lockdown. However, while complete lockdown in China saw the pandemic being brought under control, in India the same measures happened to just delay the arrival of its peak. India is now the single-biggest source of Covid-19 cases.
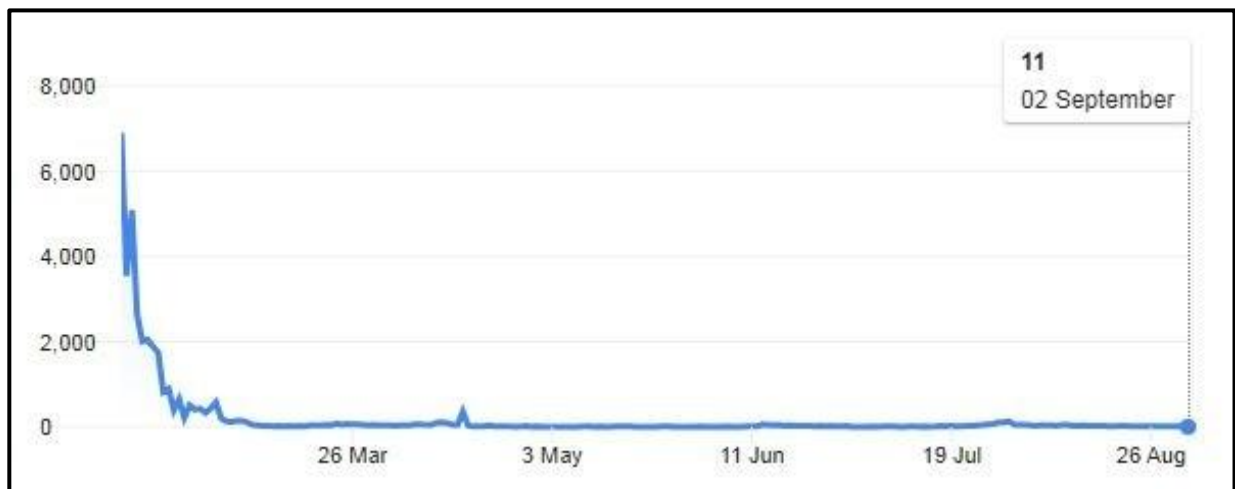
China has reported 85,077 Covid-19 cases since the beginning of the outbreak of the pandemic. China's daily case has remained in two digits on most of the days since
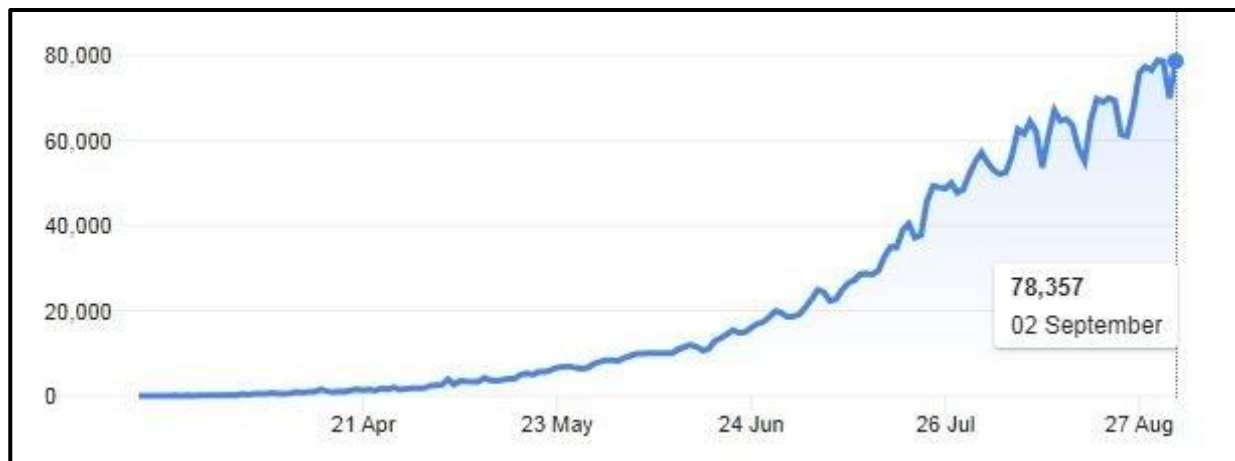
late March.

India has seen Covid-19 cases consistently rising since late March.

The good news is that the number of recovered has increased from 11.4 lakh to 29.7 lakh since August 1. But this falls much in the line with the general trend in a pandemic. Recovery rate improves, as a matter of norm, with the progress of the pandemic along time scale.What is actually worrying for India is the consistent rise in the number of active cases, which have increased from 5.67 lakh to 8.15 lakh. This shows that flattening of the Covid-19 curve may still be weeks if not months away. Testing needs to expand, horizontally and vertically. But what is being seen is that many hotspot states may have already reached their ceiling capacity in testing.

Tamil Nadu's case is curious.

Tamil Nadu has reported a consistent figure of around 6,000 cases of Covid-19 on daily basis through August

The Covid-19 dashboard of the government shows that for almost the entire month of August, Tamil Nadu reported a consistent number of fresh Covid-19 cases near 6,000-mark. On the graph, the daily caseload figures appear as boys of the same height standing in one row.

Demographically, youth make up the bulk of Covid-19 cases in India. The health ministry figures show that people aged 18-44 have 54 per cent caseload share. Of these cases, 14 per cent of the patients have been in the age-group of 18-25. Of all, eight per cent patients have been aged below 17.

Covid-19 fatalities have been highest among the senior citizens -- 60 and above -- making 51 per cent of all recorded deaths due to coronavirus infection. Two per cent of all Covid-19 deaths have happened among people below 25 years of age.

9.2 Month on, Amritsar GMCH fails to give plasma therapy to Covid patients

Source: hindustantimes.com, 5 September, 2020

Till August 5, four critically-ill patients of GMCH, Amritsar, and two of GMCH, Faridkot, were treated through plasma therapy and all six had recovered from the virus successfully.

No critically-ill Covid-19 patient was given plasma therapy at Amritsar's Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), Amritsar, in the past one month.

Plasma therapy is considered as one of the most successful treatments for Covid-19 patients. Under the convalescent plasma therapy, antibody-rich blood plasma of patients, who have recovered from Covid-19, is preserved for transfusion into critical patients. In June, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had allowed Government Medical Colleges (GMCs) in Amritsar, Faridkot and Patiala to treat Covid patients with plasma therapy.

Till August 5, four critically-ill patients of GMCH, Amritsar, and two of GMCH, Faridkot, were treated through plasma therapy and all six had recovered from the virus successfully. However, in the last one month (from August 5 to September 5), seven more Covid-19 patients at GMCH, Faridkot, were treated through plasma therapy while GMCH, Patiala, also successfully infused plasma of recovered patients into 10 critical and sick patients and helped them to recover from the virus, but no patient was given this treatment in GMCH, Amritsar.

As per the GMCH staff, the hospital is struggling in getting plasma from the donors as most of the Covid survivors are reluctant to come back to the hospitals for donation. Till August 5, the GMCH, Amritsar, could persuade only four donors to give plasma for the treatment of others.

Also, GMCH, Amritsar, is a part of the Punjab's plasma pool system through which the hospital can exchange plasma with medical colleges of Patiala and Faridkot.

"In last one month, over 55 Covid-19 patients from Amritsar died at the hospital. Besides the holy city, many more patients of neighbouring districts had also succumbed to the virus at GMCH, Amritsar. Though the hospital is admitting moderate and critically-ill Covid-19 patients daily, it is not giving plasma therapy to the patients. This is because the hospital is short of plasma donors and the plasma bank is almost running dry. At present, 22 patients of Amritsar are in GNDH's intensive care unit and 18 are on oxygen support. Also, 35 more

people from Amritsar, who are at moderate level, are admitted there and are eligible for getting the plasma treatment", said a senior doctor of the hospital, on the condition of anonymity.

Dr Avtar Dhanju, head of Covid-19 isolation ward of GMCH Amritsar, said, "We have some units of plasma available with us but most of the patients are being admitted to the hospital in extremely sick condition. No patient was eligible as per ICMR's guidelines for getting plasma from recovered patients."

9.3 Mapping corona's reproduction rate in India's worst-affected cities

Source: indiatoday.in,8 September,2020

India has now overtaken Brazil to become the second worst-affected country with coronavirus.

Regional heterogeneity is a prime aspect in the spread of coronavirus as India records more than 80,000 new cases every day.

With the country waiting in earnest for a vaccine, India Today Data Intelligence Unit (DIU) maps the spread of the infection in worst-hit cities using the reproduction rate of the virus Rt.

Rt shows the infectiousness of the virus. An Rt of 2 means one infected person is infecting two more people on average.

An Rt below 1 means one infected person is not infecting more persons, and hence the chain could be broken.

The Rt we screened is based on calculations done by India COVID Apex Research Team (iCART), a joint initiative led by AIIMS doctors and other prominent institutes. Rt data is available till August 27.

How India fares

Data shows reproduction rate of the virus in India has not gone below 1 on an average ever since it relaxed lockdown restrictions. On June 1, Rt in India was 1.09. To simply put it, 100 people who caught the infection were infecting 109 more on an average.

As of August 27, India's Rt was 1.08, meaning a meagre fall in the infectiousness of the virus. Since Covid-19 is subjected to regional variations, DIU digs deep into micro data, for the most affected cities (with more than 10,000 active cases), and here are the results.

Situation bleak in Delhi

Rt in Delhi remained below 1 throughout July and first week of August. At the same time, Delhi also saw a fall in daily cases with a high level of testing, but then came the second wave.

Since August 10, Delhi's Rt has been rising consistently. As of August 27, Rt reached 1.28, which is the highest in India among districts with over 10,000 active cases. Delhi had recorded an Rt of 1.28 on June 15 when the situation was going out of hand and Home minister Amit Shah had to intervene.

At that time, Covid-19 testing in Delhi was abysmal as it was hardly conducting 6,000 tests per day on average. After the Centre intervened, Delhi scaled its testing to 18,000-20,000 per day. For the last one week, Delhi is testing 36,000

people per day on an average. Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has asked people not to panic as the spike in infections was a result of increased testing.

Maharashtra no better

There are three cities in Maharashtra, where the number of active cases is above 10,000 and the reproduction rate of coronavirus is rising. Pune, Mumbai and Thane together account for 55 per cent of Maharashtra's Covid cases and no respite is visible in the infection rate.
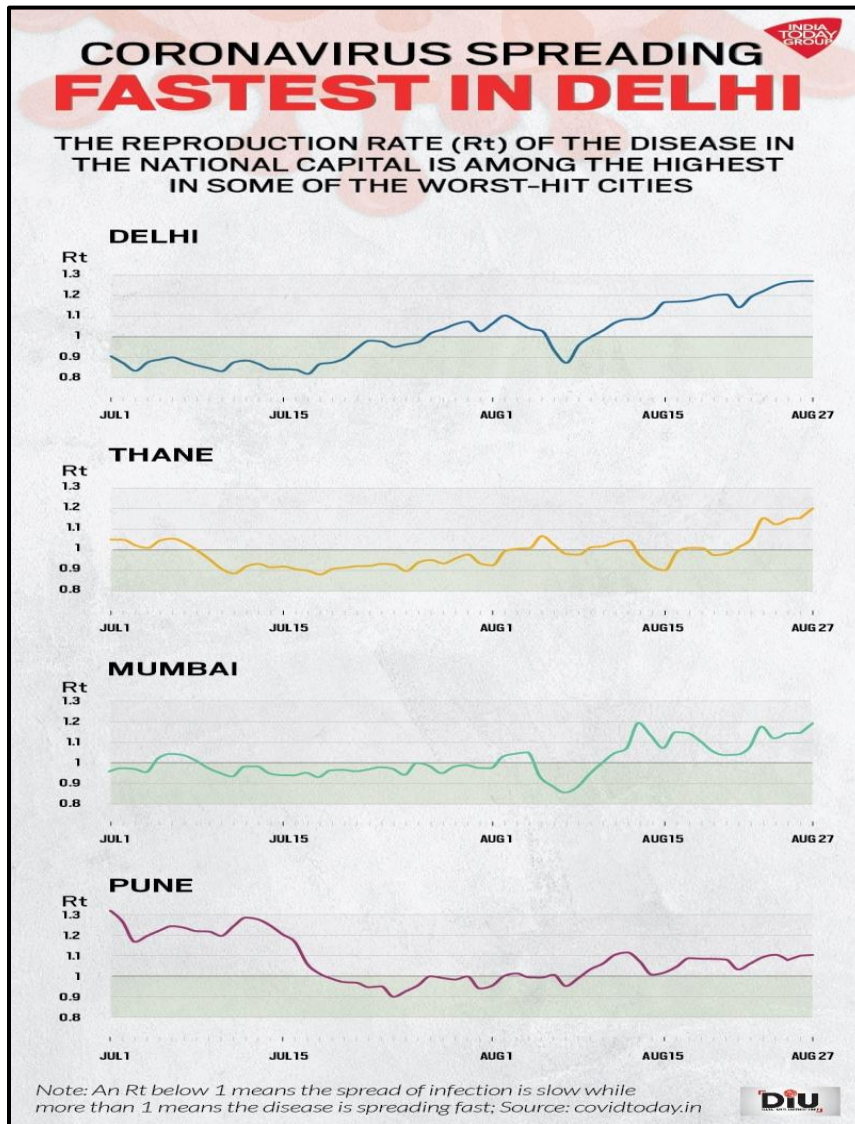
In the first week of June, Pune's Rt reached as high as 1.33. In July, it came down below 1 intermittently. As of August 27, it had an Rt of 1.11,which was still higher than the national average of 1.08. Pune at present has the highest number of active cases in India; on Monday, September 7, the city had 61,383 active cases.

When lockdown relaxations were eased, Mumbai's Rt was as low as 1. The number stayed below 1 for 52 days, but problems started after August 11 when the Rt rose above 1 and hasn't moved back since. As of August 27, the city's Rt was 1.17.

Thane had an Rt of 1.3 when lockdown restrictions were eased. Throughout July, Thane too had an Rt lower than 1, but post August 21, the city has been troubled with a rising reproduction rate as Rt touched 1.21 on August 27.

Chennai does the best

Rt in Chennai was 1.22 on June 1, which went down to 0.77 on July 1 when it had reintroduced a lockdown. Since then, it had ups and downs, but post August 18, Rt has been going down continuously, reaching 0.88 on August 27.

Bengaluru has the second highest active cases in the country after Pune. India's IT hub has 39,725 active cases as of Monday, September 7. Rt here came down from 1.3 in the first week of July to 1.01 by August 27.

Note of caution

In July, Rt in Delhi remained below 1 and its active cases were declining. Delhi was

being touted as a model state for controlling the situation, but by late August, its claims of conquering the virus were deflated.

Though many cities, including Mumbai, recorded an Rt below 1 for more than two weeks, Covid cases have started rising again and so has their Rt. The million dollar question then becomes can Rt be influenced?

COVID'S **DEADLY SPREAD** IN INDIA

THE REPRODUCTION RATE (RT) OF THE DISEASE CONTINUES TO BE HIGH, MEANING THE PANDEMIC IS SPREADING FAST IN THE COUNTRY

Note: An Rt below 1 means the spread of infection is slow while more than 1 means the disease is spreading fast; Source: covidtoday.in

Rt is calculated on the actual number of cases provided by the government. Any manipulation involved in the reported number of cases can influence Rt.

According to Dr Mohak Gupta, co-founder of iCART, "The estimated Rt depends upon the number of new cases reported daily, which in turn depends on how much a state or district is testing. As such, testing fluctuations have an effect on calculated Rt. Thus, Rt should be
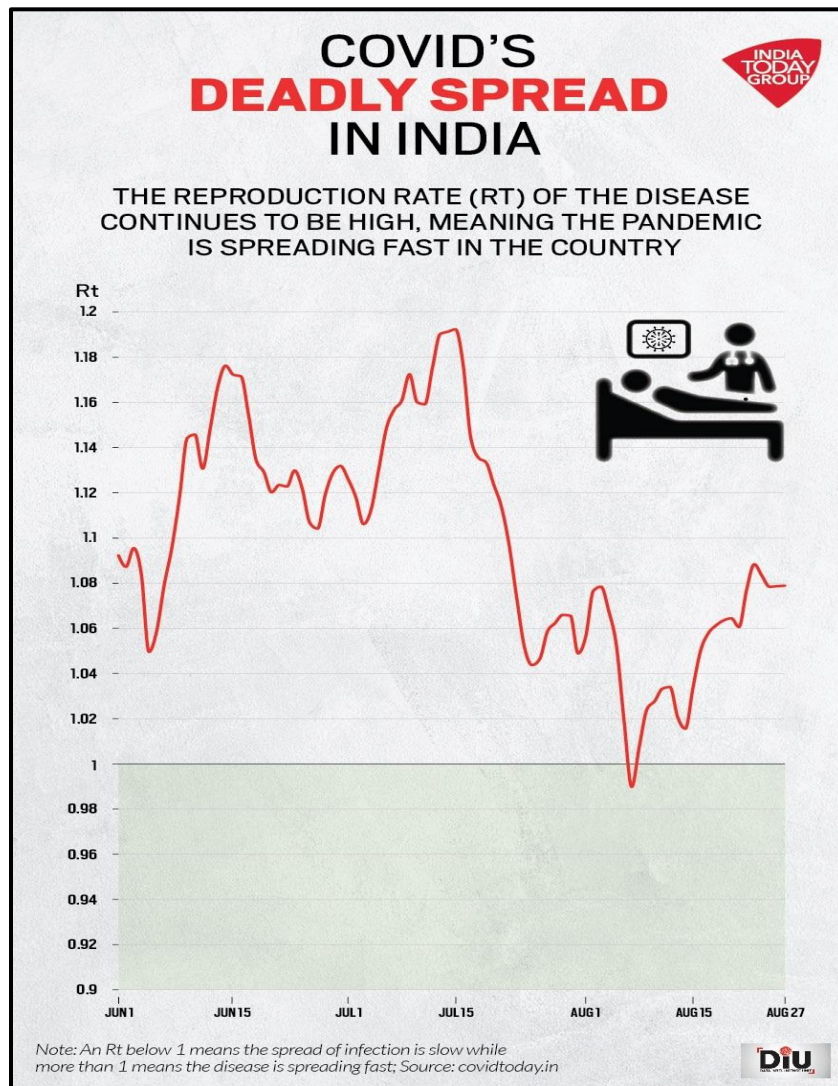
interpreted in the context of metrics that show testing adequacy, like the positivity rate, for a better understanding."

9.4 Amid spike in Covid-19 cases, Andhra Pradesh govt claims drop in seasonal diseases

Source: indiatoday.in,10 September,2020

The state government claims the drive has manged to bring down the number of seasonal diseases like Malaria, Typhoid and Dengue when compared to last year for the same period, between June and August.

The govt claims there has been a decrease in dengue cases by 97.4% from last year

The Tata Institute of Genetics and Sciences in Karnataka's Bengaluru has hailed the Andhra Pradesh government's pilot sanitation drive 'Manam Mana Parisubhratha'.

The state government claims the drive has manged to bring down the number of seasonal diseases like Malaria, Typhoid and Dengue when compared to last year for the same period, between June and August.

The Tata Institute of Genetics and Sciences said in a tweet, "It's no mean feat to achieve a drop in the number of cases of vector-borne diseases like dengue & malaria by 97.4% and 50.4% respectively. Kudos!"

The drive was carried out in villages across 13 districts of the state.

Authorities created awareness among villagers and made 5.5 lakh households follow the rule of segregating wet and dry waste.

"The next step was to allot one 'green ambassador', who was a sanitation worker and a local from the village, to pick up waste from the houses and dispose of them at the waste processing units," said Girija Shankar, Commissioner, Panchayati Raj and Rural Development.

All these villages where the drive was implemented now have solid waste processing centres - where waste is processed to make manure and then sold to farmers in that area.

"The locals in these villages were asked to donate for the sanitation drive, on a voluntary basis. It started from as low as Rs 2 and ran into thousands," added Girija Shankar

A total of Rs 1.4 crore was collected in three months, "a part of which went towards paying salaries to the sanitation workers".

NUMBER OF CASES IN 2019 COMPARED TO 2020 (June to August):

TYPHOID: Decrease of 96.05 %

June To August, 2019: 8988 CASES
June to August, 2020: 355 cases

MALARIA: Decrease of 50.04%

June To August, 2019: 1203 cases
June To August, 2020: 601 cases

DENGUE: Decrease of 97.4%

June To August, 2019: 944 cases
June To August, 2020: 24

ACUTE DIARRHEA: Decrease of 81.77%

June to August, 2019: 1,11,685
June to August, 2020: 20,355

9.5 COVID-19 Deaths and ICU Admissions Are Again Rising in Delhi

New Delhi: Delhi has witnessed a sharp surge in patients requiring hospitalisation and critical care due to COVID-19 over the past month-and-a-half. The number of deaths due to the disease has also been climbing.

However, just as health authorities have confirmed whether community transmission of the novel coronavirus is underway in India, they have been quiet about whether the current surge is part of the 'second wave'.

People wearing protective face masks stand in a line to enter a metro station amidst the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in New Delhi, India, September 14, 2020

In other, less populous countries, the 'second wave' has been the name for a spurt in the case load after a drop. In India, the national case load has been continuously on the rise. However, the regional case numbers vary considerably.

Nonetheless, in Delhi, the data indicates that the virus is once again spreading fast through specific populations.

And because it is so infectious, hospitals have been faced with a wave of patients testing their preparedness.

Indeed, many prominent private hospitals in the national capital have run out of beds in their ICUs. On the morning of September 16, according to the Delhi government's 'Corona' app, there were no ICU beds with ventilators available at Batra Hospital, Apollo Hospital, Max Patparganj, Max Saket and Maharaja Agrasen Hospital.

At other hospitals, like Gangaram and Max Shalimar Bagh, the app showed only a few available beds, implying no guarantee that a patient would get them by the time they reached the hospital. ICU beds without ventilators weren't easily available either.
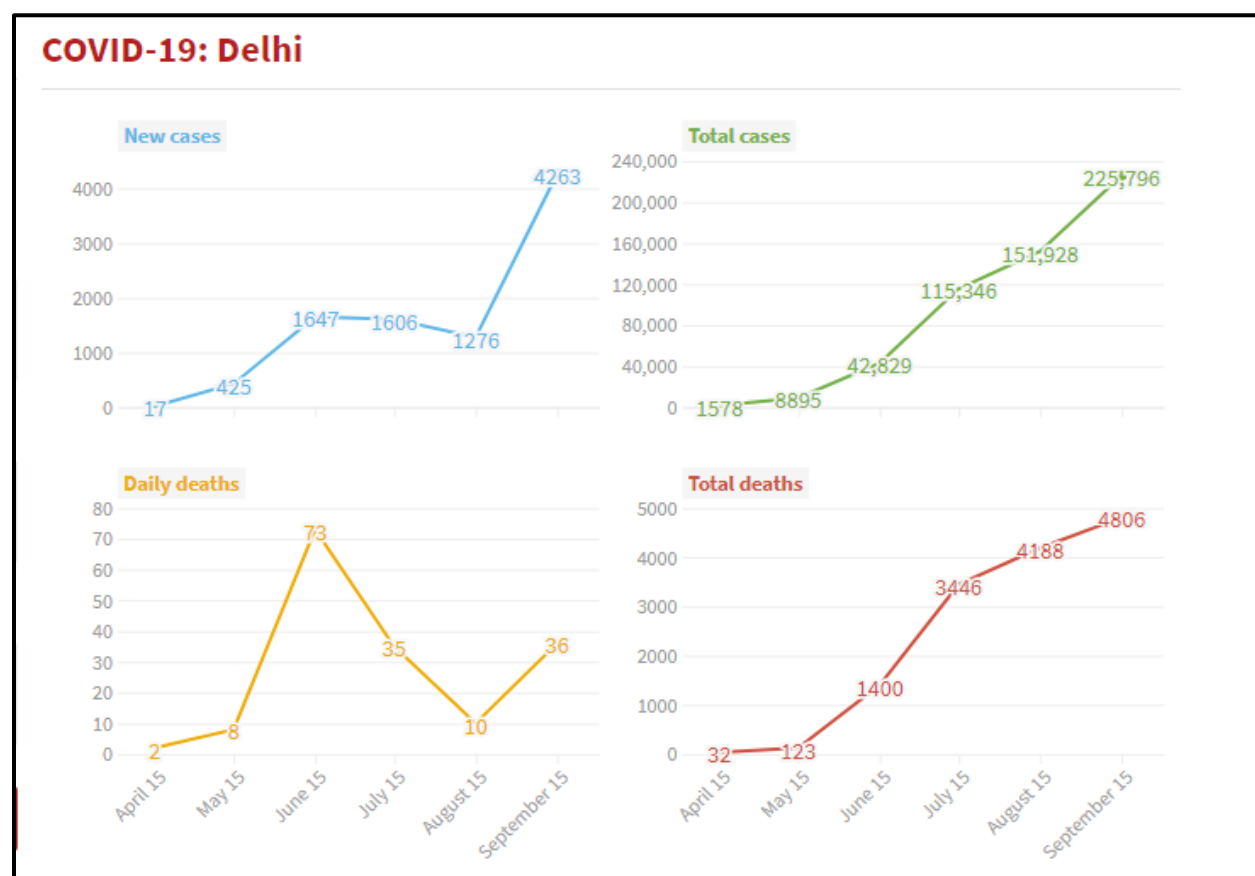
Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India • Last updated: 16 September 2020, 08:00 IST (GMT+5:30)

According to the app, 39% of beds with ventilators and 35.7% of beds without ventilators were available in ICUs around the city on the morning of September 16. This is down from 68% and 69.8%, respectively, on August 7.

In fact, the data revealed that out of a total of 1223 ICU beds with ventilators, only 477 were available across the city and in case of ICU beds without ventilators, only 477 out of 1335 were available.

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain recently ordered all 33 private hospitals in the city (with 50 beds or more) to reserve 80% of their ICU beds for COVID-19 patients.

He also said hospitals in Delhi treating COVID-19 patients have already been allowed to increase their total bed capacity by up to 30% to treat COVID-19 patients.

On the matter of testing, Jain said the government has ramped up testing volume from around 16,000 tests per day in early July to around 60,000 per day today.

The test positivity ratio is around 7.2% in Delhi, compared to the national average of about 8.8%. Over 2.25 lakh people have tested positive for the coronavirus in Delhi thus far.

Deaths due to COVID-19 have also been rising. The average number of deaths per day due to COVID-19 was over 100 in the third week of June, then dropped to 10-20 last month, before climbing to around 30 deaths a day on average this month.

On September 15, Delhi's health authorities reported 36 people had died due to COVID-19 during the last 24 hours, taking the total death to 4,808.

9.6 September surge: India No.1 in Covid cases and deaths in first 15 days

Source: timesofindia.indiatimes.com,16 September,2020

NEW DELHI: September is proving to be a grim month for India in its fight against coronavirus pandemic. According to Johns Hopkins University data, the number of people who caught the infection in the first fortnight of the month was more than twice the number of new infections in US—the second worst hit country.

Such has been the surge in the daily rise of cases that India added 1 million Covid cases in a record time of 11 days in September.

India tops Covid cases globally (Sept 1-15)

France
109,309

US
557,657

Russia
77,994

Mexico
75,875

Columbia
113,854

Spain
130,872

Peru
86,694

Brazil
483,299

India
1,308,991

Argentina
154,298
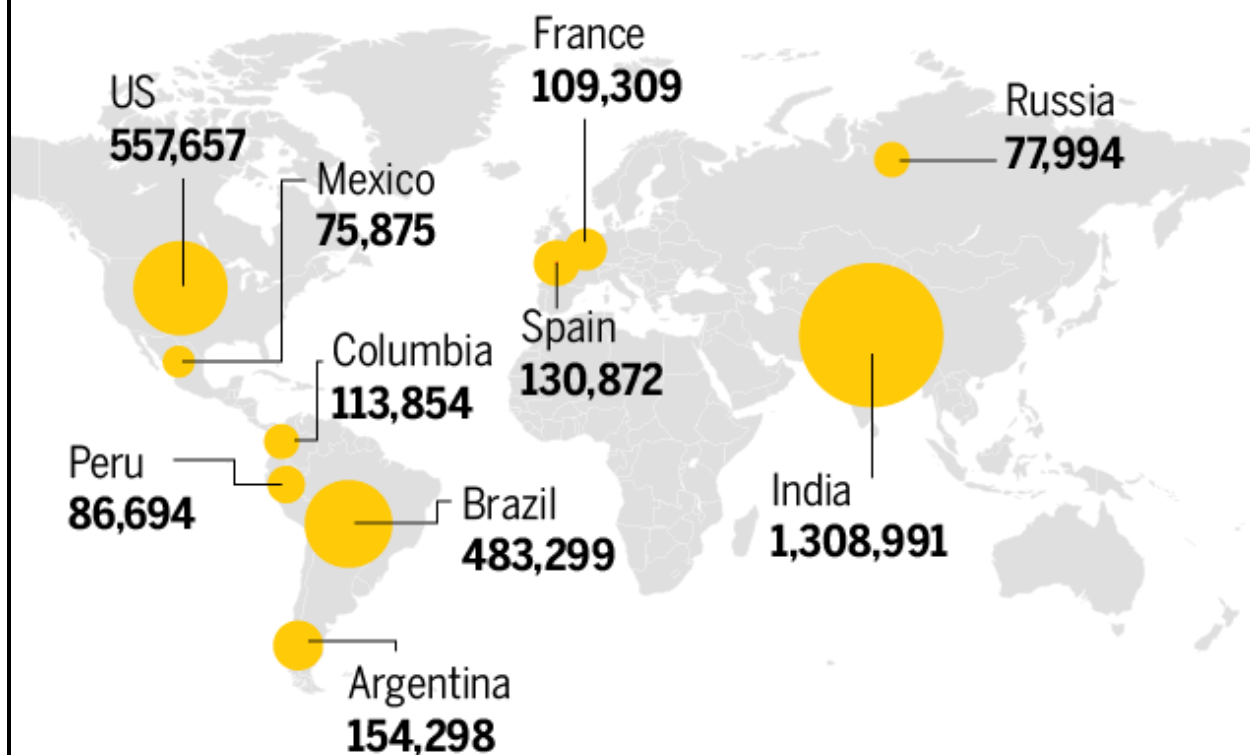
India had most Covid deaths in (Sept 1-15)

France
754

US
11,461

Russia
1,542

Mexico
6,891

Columbia
3,759

Spain
344

Peru
2,024

Brazil
11,178

India
16,307

Argentina
3,011
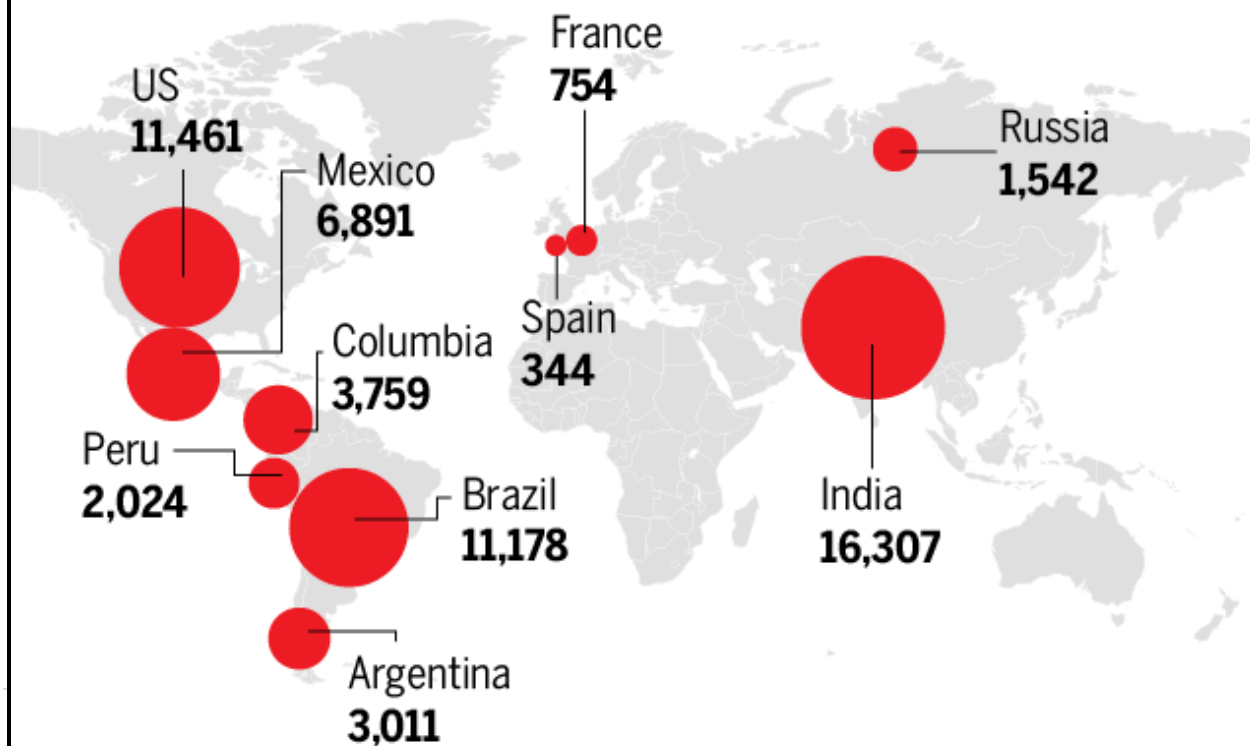
While India added 13,08,991 cases in the 15-day period, the United States registered 5,57,657 cases and Brazil which is third in this list recorded 4,83,299 cases.

India also tops the list of deaths that have happened due to the virus during this period. While India lost 16,307 lives in the 15-day period, the US and Brazil recorded 11,461 and 11,178 deaths respectively.

India's daily count of cases in September

Sept 1	69,921
Sept 2	78,357
Sept 3	83,883
Sept 4	83,341
Sept 5	86,432
Sept 6	90,632
Sept 7	90,802
Sept 8	75,809
Sept 9	89,706
Sept 10	95,735
Sept 11	96,511
Sept 12	97,570
Sept 13	94,372
Sept 14	92,071
Sept 15	83,809
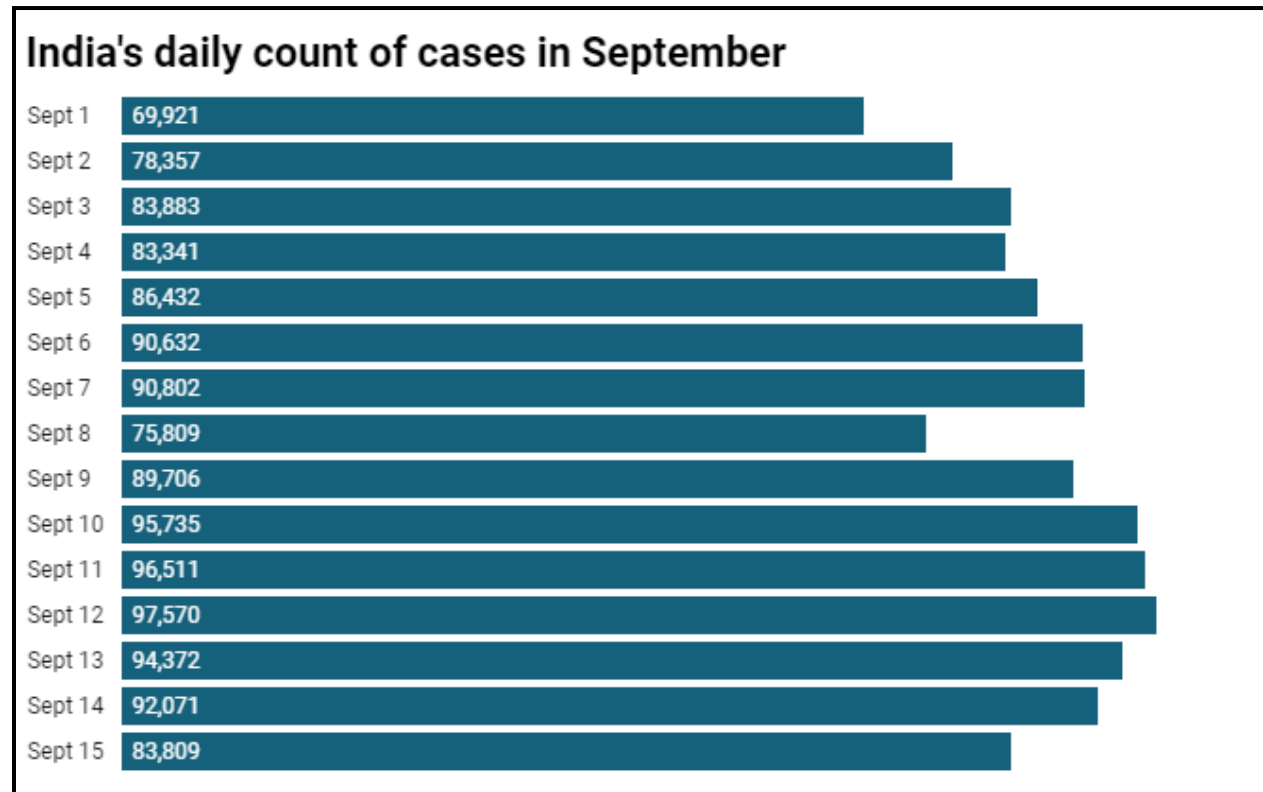
However, when it comes to the fatality rate during this 15-day period, India with a value of 1.25 stands at the 8th position. Mexico, Columbia and Peru occupy the top three positions in the list.

Top 10 countries by fatality rate (%)

Data from Sept 1-15

Colombia	3.3
Peru	2.33
Brazil	2.31
US	2.06
Russia	1.98
Argentina	1.95
India	1.25
Spain	0.58
France	0.31
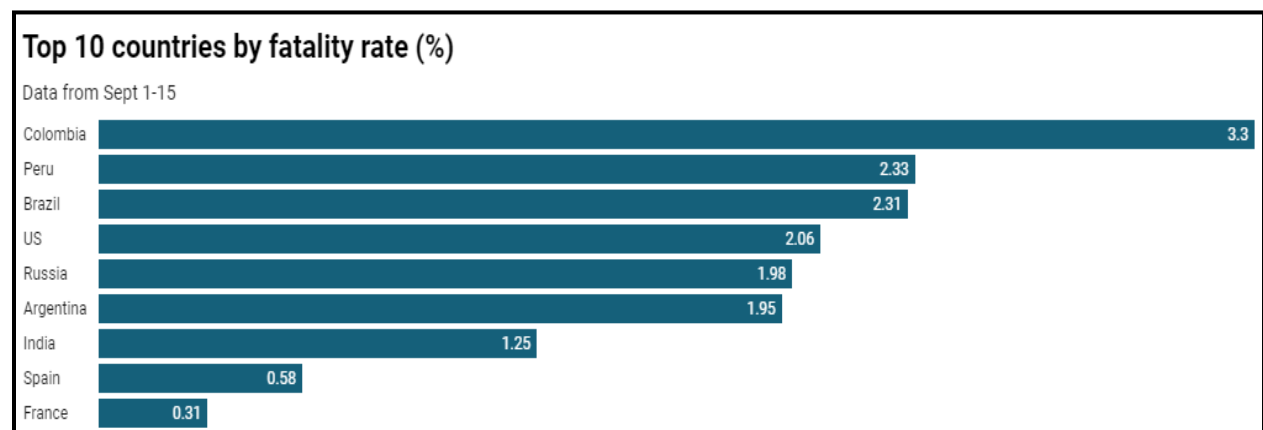
The increase in numbers is partly due to the progressive increase in the Covid-19 testing, which touched the 5.8 crore mark on September 15. India took 27 days to double its testing capacity from 1 crore to 2 crore, but took only 10 days to jump from 4 crore tests to 5 crore tests.

Per-day Covid-19 tests (Sept 1-13)

(Brazil data not available)

— India — USA — Argentina — Spain — Colombia — France — Peru — Russia — Mexico

Source: Our World in Data · Get the data

TOP 5 STATES BY CASES

Maharashtra
1,077,374

Karnataka
575,079

Andhra Pradesh
508,511

Tamil Nadu
317,195

Uttar Pradesh
467,689
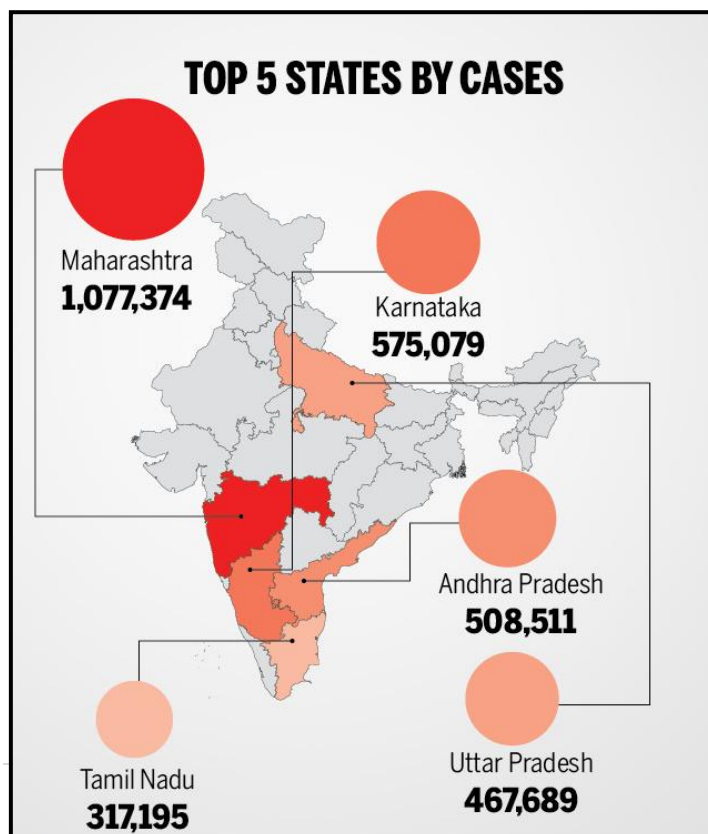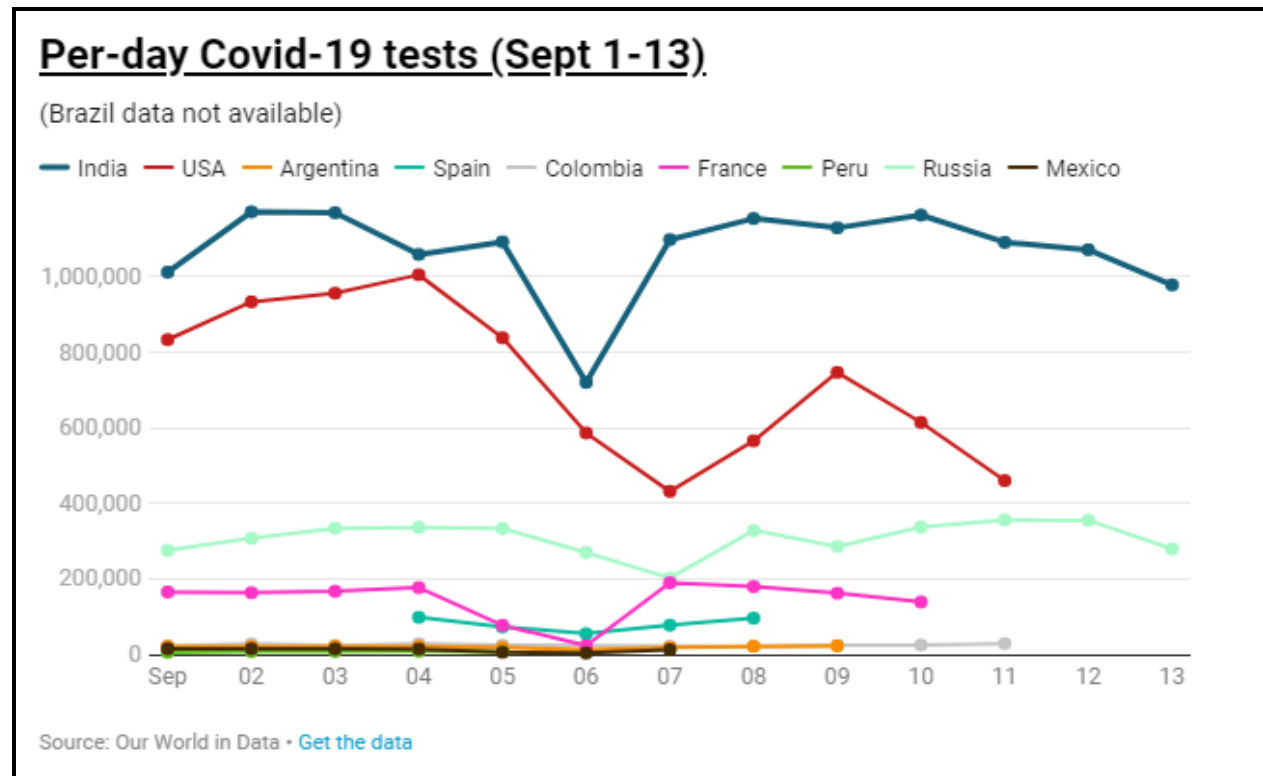
Five states - Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu - account for 60 per cent of the total active cases in the country.

While India's Covid numbers are indeed alarming, they could have been worse.

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan on Tuesday said the countrywide Covid-19 lockdown prevented

approximately 14 lakh to 29 lakh cases and 37,000 to 78,000 deaths.

Elaborating on the lockdown advantage, Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Dr Balram Bhargava said that India has been able to 'distribute the curve' as compared to other nations that saw a peak.

"We distributed the curve in such a way that we did not have those large number of deaths and that was attributable scientifically because of a very effective lockdown that was imposed in the months late March, April and May. So, we did not really have a huge peak from that perspective," he said.

Another statistics that may provide us some relief in these worrying times is that India's Covid-19 recovery rate has risen to 78.28 per cent. A total of 38,59,399 people have recuperated, exceeding the active cases of Coronavirus by 28,69,338 as on September 15, according to the Union health ministry.

9.7 Impact on tax filing due to Covid-19

Source: timesnownews.com,19 September,2020

Considering the currenteconomic situation, the government has provided some relaxation with respect to some of the key compliance timelines for individual taxpayers. Homi Mistry, Deloitte explains in detail
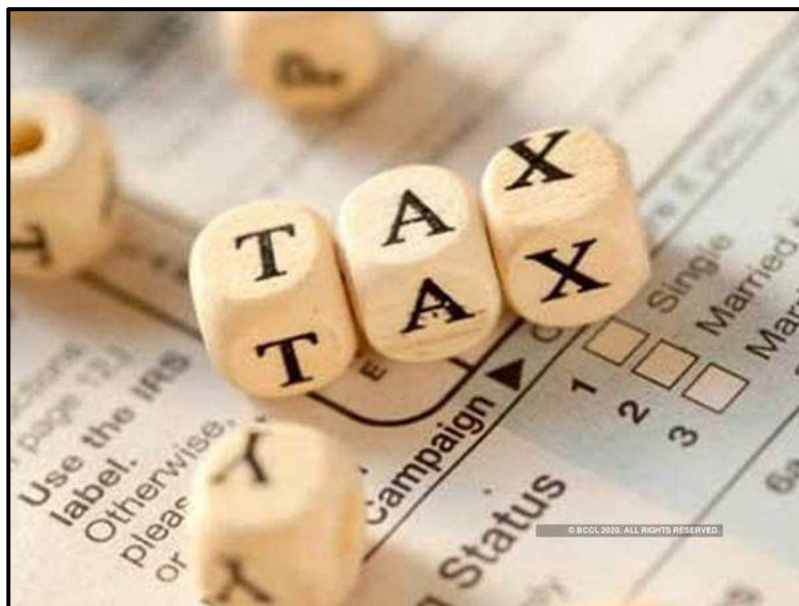
The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has caused severe disruption and has already had a far-reaching impact on every aspect of our lives. While the focus of governments is primarily to curtail the spread of the virus, they also have the tough task of managing the economic fallout due to this pandemic. Considering the current economic situation, the government has provided some relaxation with respect to some of the key compliance timelines

for individual taxpayers so that there are no penal consequences for delays that are beyond the control of taxpayers. Some such relaxations are discussed below:

Extensions of deadlines

There have been extensions of the following deadlines for individual taxpayers. Here is a quick snapshot of the extended deadlines along with original deadlines:

EXTENSION OF TAX FILING DEADLINES

TIMESNOWNEWS.COM

Source: Deloitte India

Compliance	Original deadline	Extended deadline
PAN and Aadhaar linking	31 March 2020	31 March 2021
Filing of tax returns for FY 2019-20	31 July 2020	30 November 2020
Issuing India tax withholding certificate (Form-16) for FY 2019-20	15 June 2020	15 August 2020
Filing of belated and revised tax returns for FY 2018-19	31 March 2020	30 September 2020
Vivaad se Vishwas Scheme	31 March 2020	31 December 2020
Investment for tax savings purposes i.e. investments/payments under section 80C (LIC, PPF, NSC etc.), 80D (Mediclaim), 80G (Donations) etc.	31 March 2020	31 July 2020
Filing of tax withholding returns (E-TDS) of Q4 of FY 2019-20	31 May 2020	31 July 2020
Completion of tax scrutiny relating to FY 2017-18	30 September 2020	31 March 2021
Completion of tax scrutiny relating to FY 2018-19	31 March 2021	30 September 2021

Deductions and exemptions to be claimed for FY 2019-20

To allow taxpayers some leeway towards saving taxes for FY 2019-20, the government has issued the Taxation and Other Laws Ordinance, 2020.

Investments and payments made for claiming deduction under section 80C (LIC, PPF, NSC, etc), section 80D (Mediclaim), section 80G (Donations), section 80CCD(1B) (NPS deposits), section 80DD (expenses on medical treatment of differently-abled dependants), etc., are now eligible for being claimed in FY 2019-20, where payment/investment is made till July 31, 2020.

The date for making investments in order to claim capital gains exemption under section 54 to section 54GB is extended to September 30, 2020, for FY 2019-20. Therefore, any investment, deposit, payment, acquisition, purchase, construction, or any similar action, which was required to be made for claiming exemption as per the above sections, can now be made until September 30, 2020. For example, the deadline for investment in capital gains bonds that must be made within six months of the date of sale of the asset, also now stands extended.

Relaxation on interest implications

In order to provide relief to small and middle-class taxpayers (e.g. salaried individuals, individuals with other sources income, etc.), the CBDT had extended the date for payment of self-assessment tax in the case of a taxpayer whose self-assessment tax liability is up to Rs 1 Lakh, to November 30, 2020. Therefore, there is a waiver of interest u/s 234A (interest levied for delay in filing the tax return beyond the due date) to the taxpayers whose self-assessment tax payable is up to Rs 1 Lakh.

However, the CBDT has clarified that there will be no extension of date for the payment of self-assessment tax for taxpayers having self-assessment tax liability exceeding Rs 1 lakh. Hence, interest under section 234A will be levied from August 1, 2020, till the date of filing the tax return.

All delayed payments of advance tax, self-assessment tax, TDS, etc. whose due date falls between the period March 20, 2020, to June 29, 2020, will be charged at reduced interest rate i.e., 9% p.a. instead of 12% p.a. The reduced rate of interest of 9% p.a. for delayed payments of taxes, levies, etc. shall not be applicable for the payments made after June 30, 2020.

Other relief measures

Relaxing residency rules - The Indian government, as part of several COVID-19 relief measures, has relaxed residency norms for individuals stranded in India owing to lockdown. Many individuals had visited India during the FY 2019-20 and intended to leave India before the end of FY 2019-20. However, due to the declaration of lockdown and suspension of international flights, individuals were required to / extend their stay in India. This extended period of stay in India may result in a change of residential status for certain individuals. Therefore, such an extended period of stay would be excluded from determining residential status for FY 2019-20 in accordance with the CBDT circular No. 11 dated 08 May 2020.

While the government has taken steps to ease the burden for taxpayers, it is the responsibility of each taxpayer to discharge their tax obligations in a timely manner.

Taxpayers should evaluate their compliance obligations and comply with the same within the extended timelines in order to avoid any penal consequences at a later date.

9.8 India Covid-19 numbers explained, Sept 23: After Pune & Delhi, Bengaluru crosses 2 lakh cases

Source:indianexpress.com,23 September,2020

India coronavirus numbers explained: Bengaluru has been reporting between two and three thousand cases every day since the start of August, but in the last ten days, this number has been around the mid-3,000s.

A rapid test for Covid-19 is conducted in Mumbai on September 22, 2020

Bengaluru, on Tuesday, became the third city in the country to have more than two lakh people infected with novel coronavirus. The city reported a little over 3,000 new cases on Tuesday to go past the two lakh-mark. Only Pune and Delhi have more people infected with the virus.

But Bengaluru has far greater number of active cases than even Delhi. The number of active cases is now touching 40,000 in the city. Only Pune has more, about 60,000. Bengaluru has been reporting between two and three thousand cases every day since the start of August, but in the last ten days, this number has been around the mid-3,000s. The city accounts for more than 37 per cent of all the confirmed infections in Karnataka.

At the national level, the number of recoveries remained higher than the detection of new cases for the fifth straight day on Tuesday, the longest that this trend has held. In fact, since June, there have been only three occasions before this when the daily recovery had exceeded the detection of new infections.

TOP TEN STATES WITH MAXIMUM CASELOAD

EXPRESS explained.

STATE	TOTAL POSITIVE	NEW CASES	TOTAL RECOVERIES	DEATHS
Maharashtra	1,242,770	18,390	936,554	33,806
Andhra Pradesh	639,302	7,553	562,376	5,461
Tamil Nadu	552,674	5,337	497,377	8,947
Karnataka	533,850	6,974	432,450	8,247
Uttar Pradesh	364,543	5,650	296,183	5,212
Delhi	253,075	3,816	216,401	5,051
West Bengal	231,484	3,182	202,030	4,483
Odisha	192,548	4,237	153,213	789
Telangana	177,070	2,296	146,135	1,062
Bihar	171,465	1,609	157,056	873

DATA AS ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2020

The result has been a significant decline in the number of active cases in the country in the last five days. It has fell from a high of 10.17 lakh on September 17 to a little over 9.68 lakh now.

The number of recoveries usually tail the new detections by about two weeks, because that is the normal time that it takes for an infected person to recover from the disease. The number of recoveries being reported now is roughly the same as the new detections that were happening about two weeks ago. On Monday, the recoveries even crossed the one-lakh figure, a milestone that the new detections are yet to touch.

The number of recoveries exceeding the new cases is a very welcome trend, and gives the hope that the spread of the disease might finally be contracting. However, the current trend might at least partially be explained with a relative reduction in the number of tests being carried out in the country in the last one week, which has resulted in the comparatively lower discovery of new infections. As such, this trend could be a temporary phenomenon and can reverse anytime. Also, it might not be projecting a very accurate picture of the ground situation.
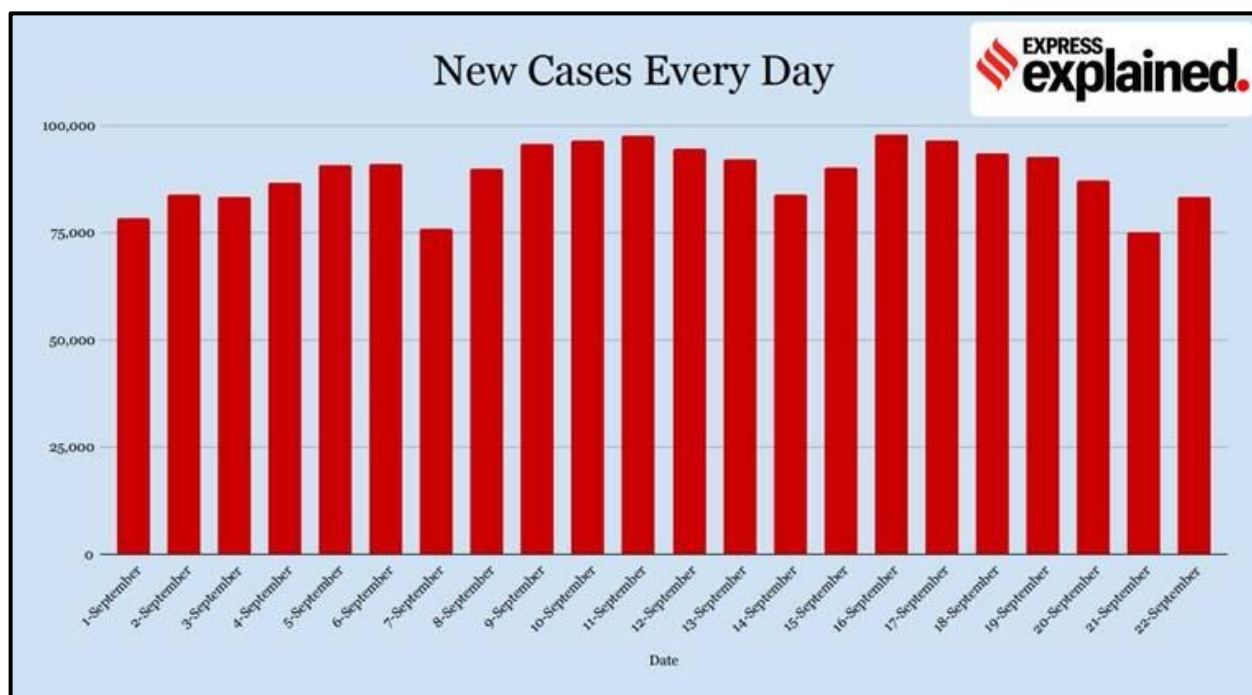
India's daily Covid-19 count in September

India's daily new cases have remained in the 90,000s for almost three weeks now.. It had last spent this long a time in the 60,000s before making a big leap, and quickly moving into the 90,000s. In the last one week, the testing numbers have been slightly lower than normal, and not just on the weekends. In the last three days, for example, the number of samples having been tested have averaged around 8.72 lakh, much lower than the 10-11 lakh samples are were being tested before that. This has been mainly responsible for keeping the daily new detections from showing any big surge.

The number of coronavirus-related deaths in the country has gone past 90,000. India now accounts for almost ten per cent of all the deaths that have happened in the world.

9.9 Sea and road transport recovering, air transport still under lockdown pressure: India Ratings

Source:newindianexpress.com,28 September,2020

With airline carriers re-starting operations from June, air transport activity too is normalising with plant load factor at around 65 per cent for flights though substantial fleet remains grounded.

Passengers can now get tested for Covid-19 at the Delhi airport

MUMBAI: The sea and road transportation segment witnessed a continued recovery on a month-on-month basis in August though it remains lower year-on-year, according to India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra).

Ports volumes continued the recovery trend displayed in June and July by improving to 85 to 90 per cent of the pre-COVID levels. In August, E-way bill collections rose 2 per cent m-o-m while railway volumes were up 4 per cent y-o-y.

With airline carriers re-starting operations from June, said Ind-Ra, air transport activity too is normalising with plant load factor at around 65 per cent for flights though substantial fleet remains grounded and passenger numbers in July were significantly below normal levels.

The overall major port volumes witnessed a monthly improvement in August, though the volume trade remains lower y-o-y. The overall major port volumes recovered in August, reporting a decline of 10 per cent y-o-y. During April to August, the overall volumes fell by 17 per cent.

The recovery in monthly volumes was led by 38 per cent and 29 per cent increase in imports of iron ore and fertilisers respectively. Dwell time for import containers at JNPT Port witnessed a monthly improvement to 22 hours in July with a gradual resumption of business activities. At the same time, said Ind-Ra, port dwell time for export containers increased marginally to 75 hours in July.

Road transportation witnessed traction with a gradual increase in the availability of trucks and an increase in the supply of labourers, leading to a decline railway market share which had increased in April. The market share of the road stood at 80 per cent during August. E-way bill collection at 49 million in August is gradually returning to normalcy. It stood at 86 per cent of the pre-COVID levels and remains 3 per cent y-o-y lower.

Diesel consumption too witnessed an increase with a gradual pick-up in the business activities post lockdown. However, diesel consumption witnessed a m-o-m decline of 15 per cent and 12 per cent during July and August compared to the m-o-m decline of 11 per cent in July and August 2019.

While average freight rates witnessed a negligible increase, the impact of higher diesel prices is likely to weigh on profitability. Diesel prices though declined by about 10 per cent m-o-m in August.

With GDP forecasts being revised further downwards, the recovery in corporate travel could be slower than Ind-Ra's initial expectations and could remain under pressure even in 1H FY22. Passenger traffic nearly remained nil in April and June due to the nationwide lockdown and travel restrictions.

Few domestic carriers started operations in May and June. However, said Ind-Ra, the current passenger load factor at 59 to 76 per cent may not be truly representative of the actual recovery as a large number of aircraft are still grounded.

Freight traffic in July stood at around 65 per cent of normal air freight volumes, impacted by overall weakness in economic activity, lack of manpower, and significant erosion in overall available belly-load freight capacity with many passenger aircraft grounded.

9.10 One in 15 individuals exposed to COVID-19 by August: ICMR survey

Source:deccanchronicle.com,30 September,2020

New Delhi: One in 15 individuals, aged 10 years and above, are estimated to have been exposed to SARS-CoV2 by August 2020, the second sero-survey conducted by ICMR has found. According to ICMR, this shows that a considerable population is still susceptible to COVID-19.

While giving out the details of the survey, ICMR Director General Dr Balram Bhargava said 6.6 per cent of the 29,082 people (aged 10 and above) surveyed between August 17 to

September 22 showed evidence of past exposure to COVID-19 and 7.1 per cent of the adult population (aged 18 and above) also showed evidence of past exposure to it.

A health worker takes samples for COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Tests, as coronavirus cases surge across the city, in Guwahati, Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2020
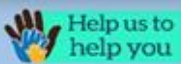
Dr Bhargava added that though lockdown, containment and behavioral change at population level have managed to check the potential spread of SARS-CoV2, the survey findings show that about 90 per cent of the population is still vulnerable. The survey showed that urban slums (15.6%) and non-slum (8.2%) areas had higher SARS-COV2 infection prevalence than that in rural areas (4.4%). The second sero-survey was conducted in the same 700 villages and wards from 70 districts from 21 states which were covered during the first survey. The first sero-survey of May 2020 revealed that the nationwide prevalence of novel coronavirus infection was only 0.73%. The second survey further showed that there is a lower infection to case ratio in August compared to May which reflects a substantial increase in testing and detection across India. Meanwhile, Union health secretary Mr Rajesh Bhushan said considerable decline has been noted in states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh but in Kerala cases are on the rise.

The health secretary also said that the government does not agree to the Rs 80,000 crore figures put out by Serum Institute of India for the Covid-19 vaccines, saying: "We have calculated the amount required in the meetings and currently, that amount is available with the government." He added that a panel of experts on vaccine administration has met five times to work out the modalities.

OCTOBER 2020

10.1 Coronavirus Highlights: COVID-19 Cases In India Cross 63 Lakh-Mark

Source:ndtv.com,2 October,2020

Coronavirus India Highlights: The country now has 63,12,585 cases of coronavirus, including 9,40,705 active cases, 52.7 lakh recoveries and 98,678 deaths.

Coronavirus cases in India: India trails the US in the list of nations hit worst by COVID-19

New Delhi: India recorded 86,821 new coronavirus cases and 1,181 deaths in the last 24 hours, taking its COVID-19 tally past the 63-lakh mark, according to the Health Ministry data released this morning.

The country now has 63,12,585 cases of coronavirus, including 9,40,705 active cases, 52.7 lakh recoveries and 98,678 deaths.

At 85,376, India recorded fewer one-day recoveries than new cases. The overall recovery rate in the country is 83.5 per cent. Its daily positivity rate was 6.1 per cent and fatality rate is 1.6 per cent. A total of 14 lakh tests were done in the last 24 hours and 7.6 crore tests

have been done in India till now. India, which trails the US in the list of nations hit worst by coronavirus, has been recording the world's highest daily Covid spike since August 8.

While announcing the next phase of lifting of coronavirus-related restrictions, the Centre said schools and colleges, shut since March as lockdown was announced across the country, will be allowed to re-open from October 15. The final call, however, has been left to the states and the institutions involved. Online and distance learning shall continue to be the preferred mode of teaching and shall be encouraged, the Centre said.

The government also gave a go ahead to cinema halls, multiplexes, and exhibition halls, but their reopening will be tempered with certain restrictions.

10.2 COVID-19 India update for Monday, October 5

Source: timesnownews.com, 5 October,2020

India crossed a landmark milestone as the active cases have been maintained below the 10 lakh mark for 14 days unabated. National recovery rate currently at 84.34%.

Mumbai: India's Covid-19 tally surges past 66-lakh mark with a spike of 74,442 new cases & 903 deaths reported in last 24 hours. The total case tally stands at 66,23,816 including 9,34,427 active cases.

The Deputy CEO of National Health Authority said that India stands out in terms of its COVID response. Our fatality rate is one of the lowest in the world. Our hospitals are capable to handle cases. For a developing country, the response is satisfactory & we're trying to live up to expectations.

Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan along with Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath digitally inaugurated Super Speciality Block (SSB) at Motilal Nehru Medical College, Prayagraj. The 220-bedded facility has been dedicated as a COVID Hospital (DCH) to the nation. The Education Ministry said that schools must ensure a smooth transition of students from home-based schooling during COVID-19 lockdown to formal schooling.

The ministry also announced that there will be no assessment till up to 2-3 weeks of schools' reopening and there should be flexibility in attendance norms. The ministry has asked States, UTs to prepare own SOPs for health, safety precautions for reopening of schools as per local requirements. Here's the latest on COVID-19 from your state:

Delhi reported 1,947 new COVID-19 cases, 3,588 recoveries/discharges/migrations and 32 deaths. Total number of cases rose to 2,92,560 including 2,63,938 recoveries/discharges/migrations and 5,542 deaths. Active cases stood at 23,080 according to the Delhi govt.

Maharashtra reported 10,244 new COVID-19 cases, 263 deaths and 12,982 discharges. Total cases in the state rose to 14,53,653, including 38,347 deaths and 11,62,585 discharges. Active cases stood at 2,52,277. Mumbai recorded 1,813 new COVID-19 cases and 47 deaths, taking the number of active cases to 24,199 and death toll to 9,152. 19 new COVID-19 cases reported in the Dharavi area of Mumbai, taking the total number of cases to 3,258 including 185 active cases and 2,781 discharges. Pune-Lonavala local train services to resume from October 12 for essential service providers.

Tamil Nadu reported 5,395 new COVID-19 cases, 5,572 recoveries & 62 deaths, taking total positive cases to 6,25,391, including 5,69,664 discharged cases, 9,846 deaths & 45,881 active cases. Kerala recorded 5,042 new COVID-19 positive cases in the last 24 hours. Active cases in the state stood at 84,873. Bihar reported 907 new COVID-19 positive cases on October 4. Total count of active cases stood at 12,833. Haryana reported 1,031 COVID-19 cases, 1,255 recoveries and 21 deaths taking total cases to 1,34,909 with 1,21,596 recoveries, 1,491 deaths and 11,822 active cases. Rajasthan reported 2165 new COVID-19 cases & 14 deaths. The total number of positive cases rose to 1,46,195 including 21,215 active cases, and 1,559 deaths.

Gujarat reported 1,327 new COVID-19 cases & 13 deaths. Total cases in the state rose to 1,44,027, including 1,23,770 discharges and 3,512 deaths. The number of active cases in the state now at 16,745.

Jharkhand reported 816 new COVID19 cases, 1284 recoveries and 4 deaths, taking total cases to 88,026 including 76,843 recoveries, 747 deaths and 10,436 active cases.

Madhya Pradesh reported 29 deaths and 1,460 fresh COVID-19. The total number of positive cases in the state stood at 1,37,098 including 18,757 active cases, 1,15,878 recoveries and 2,046 deaths.

Karnataka reported 7,051 new COVID-19 cases, 7,064 discharges and 84 deaths, taking total cases to 6,47,712 including 5,22,846 discharges and 9,370 deaths. The number of active cases in the state stood at 1,15,477.

10.3 COVID-19 cases in India breach 68-lakh mark

Source:thehindu.com,8 October,2020

A health worker takes a nasal swab to test for COVID-19 in New Delhi, India, Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 68,35,655, while the death toll climbed to 1,05,526 with 971 people succumbing to the disease in a span of 24 hours, the data updated at 8 a.m. showed. India saw a single-day rise of 78,524 COVID-19 cases taking the virus caseload to over 68 lakh, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to

58,27,704, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday. The COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 85.25%.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 68,35,655, while the death toll climbed to 1,05,526 with 971 people succumbing to the disease in a span of 24 hours, the data updated at 8 a.m. showed. The total recoveries have surged to 58,27,704 while there are 9,02,425 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country which comprises 13.20% of the total caseload, the data stated. The COVID-19 case fatality rate has dropped to 1.54%. India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16 and crossed 60 lakh on September 28.

According to the ICMR, a cumulative total of 8,34,65,975 samples have been tested up to October 7 with 11,94,321 samples being tested on Wednesday.

The 971 new fatalities include 355 from Maharashtra, 113 from Karnataka, 67 from Tamil Nadu, 58 from West Bengal, 47 from Uttar Pradesh, 35 from Delhi, 34 from Andhra Pradesh, 33 from Punjab and 30 Chhattisgarh. A total of 1,05, 526 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 39,072 from Maharashtra followed by 9,984 from Tamil Nadu, 9,574 from Karnataka, 6,200 from Uttar Pradesh, 6,086 from Andhra Pradesh, 5, 616 from Delhi, 5,376 from West Bengal, 3,712 from Punjab and 3,531 from Gujarat. The Health Ministry stressed that more than 70% of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities. "Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the Ministry said on its website, adding that State-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

10.4 Pune's daily Covid tally remains under 1,000-mark for past one week

Source: hindustantimes.com,12 October,2020

This is for the first time after July, when cases have remained under the 1,000-mark throughout the week even as number of tests have been in the range of 4,000-4,600 barring Sunday, when it sees a drop due to it been the weekend.

Pune's tally of daily positive Covid-19 cases has been below the 1,000-mark for the past one week, bringing some respite to the civic administration battling the pandemic for the past seven months.

This is for the first time after July, when cases have remained under the 1,000-mark throughout the week even as number of tests have been in the range of 4,000-4,600 barring Sunday, when it sees a drop due to it been the weekend

A healthcare worker at a Covid-19 testing centre in Pune, India, on Sunday, October 11, 2020

The city's positivity rate, which was 30.5% in the first week of September and 23.9% at the beginning of October has dropped to 20.39% during October 2 to October 11 (see box).

With the daily caseload falling at a time when the state government has increased the bed capacity in the city and rest of the district, the number of non-oxygen beds to remain vacant by October 15 are expected to be 13,020 while oxygen beds to remain unoccupied will be 763, according to the administration's projection.

The projection, prepared based on the statistical model by IIT Bombay and other experts, also indicates 243 ventilators and 1,185 ICU beds to be vacant by mid-October as the situation eases.

The drop in the number of daily cases and positivity rate is being observed even after the state government has allowed restaurants and bars to operate their dine-in facility since October 5. With shop timings also increased and most sectors, including hotel industry and travel allowed, there's increased crowd in the market, which has prompted the administration to ask the citizens to exercise caution.

Dr Subhash Salunkhe, chairman of the Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control Technical Committee, said, "It is too early to say that the infection is coming under control. The government has only recently opened restaurants and bars and there are festivals

planned in the future. It is true that the number of cases is falling daily, but we will know the exact situation only after Diwali."

Despite several attempts, the Pune Municipal Corporation additional commissioner Rubal Agarwal and Pune divisional commissioner Saurabh Rao were unavailable for comment on the bed projections.

"With most things open, many people are stepping out of their home. However, it has been seen that people are still not wearing masks," deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar had said during his Pune visit on Friday.

Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray too on Sunday asked people in the state to be careful and follow norms. "While the cases have dropped in the past few days, people need to be careful," said Thackeray in his public addresses aired on social media.

Thackeray's caution came a day after Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope on Saturday indicated that by the end of November, remaining restrictions under the lockdown will also be lifted in the state and all sectors will be allowed to reopen. Tope had said, that the government is now planning to give permission of reopening schools and religious places in the coming days.

10.5 Schools in Punjab to open from October 19, number of students, class hours restricted

Source: hindustantimes.com,15 October,2020

Only students of classes 9 to 12 will be allowed to attend physical classes with parental consent, while online classes will continue as usual.

The Punjab government has decided to allow schools to reopen outside containment zones from October 19, Monday.

Only students of classes 9 to 12 will be allowed to attend physical classes while online classes will continue as usual.

After the Centre in its latest reopening guideline asked states to decided on a date of reopening schools, the Punjab government gave a go-ahead to reopen schools after seven months since they were shut in March when the nationwide lockdown was announced.

It was decided that schools will open after October 15, but the date was not announced.

The Centre asked states to decided on the reopening of schools after October 15

Education minister Vijay Inder Singla has earlier said that once the SOP prepared by the department gets approval by the health department, the date will be announced.

"In the first phase, schools will be opened for class 9 to 12. Students have to take written permission from their parents to attend the classes.

If a student does not want to attend physical classes, he can continue online classes from their home.

They will not be forced, they will have an option," he added. Schools in Uttar Pradesh will also reopen from October 19.

Classes will be held in shifts and all necessary protocols including social distancing and proper sanitisation of premises will have to be followed by schools, the state government announced.

10.6 Covid-19 vaccine tracker: Trial of nasal vaccines soon in India; Ongoing trials cover all age groups, assures Harsh Vardhan

Source: hindustantimes.com,18 October,2020

Bharat Biotech, which is developing an indigenous vaccine in collaboration with Indian Council of Medical Research, has entered into an agreement with Washington University and St. Louis University for the trials of the nasal vaccine candidate.

Whether the vaccines under trial will work on all age groups remains a debatable issue as for trials young, healthy participants are generally chosen

Though at present there is no nasal vaccine under trial in India, Pune's Serum Institute of India and Hyderabad's Bharat Biotech will soon start clinical trials of intranasal Covid-19 vaccines, Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan said.

Bharat Biotech, which is developing an indigenous vaccine in collaboration with Indian Council of Medical Research, has entered into an agreement with Washington University and St. Louis University for the trials of the nasal vaccine candidate.

Serum Institute of India, which is conducting the phase 2/3 clinical trial of Oxford-Astrazeneca vaccine, has an agreement with Codagenix for its nasal vaccine.

Nasal vaccines are shots which can be administered through the nose thereby requiring no doctor or nurse for the administration of this.

Answering a question on the inclusivity of the vaccines presently under trial, Harsh Vardhan said participants in the vaccine trial include young and old people as well. Serum Institute's phase 3 trial includes people up to 99 years old. The lower age limit 1s 12 for most of the ongoing trials, the minister informed.

A day after, Dr Reddy's got approval for the clinical trial of Russia's Sputnik V, it has been learnt that Mankind pharma has collaborated with the Russian Direct Investment Fund for sale and distribution of Sputnik V in India.

10.7 Colleges to open in first week of November

Source:newindianexpress.com,21 October,2020

The DyCM had said this will be confirmed after a meeting with Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, which is scheduled in three days, a source said.

Students stage protest against the government's decision to reopen colleges, in Bengaluru on Saturday

BENGALURU: While there is no official announcement yet about the start of the academic year offline for college students, top officials from the education department have indicated that colleges will reopen offline in the first week of November, and preparations for the

same are on.Deputy Chief Minister Dr C N Ashwath Narayan, who is also Higher Education Minister, told reporters on Monday that the department is preparing to reopen colleges in November. UGC has come out with an advisory for state governments to reopen colleges, he said.

The DyCM had said this will be confirmed after a meeting with Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, which is scheduled in three days, a source said. A top source from the department confirmed to TNIE that the department is looking to open colleges in the first week of November. However, students will be given a choice between offline and online classes, the source added.

A committee of current vice-chancellors of universities, that met on Saturday, also reportedly suggested that classes be held on Sundays too, if need be."The committee can only recommend how colleges can be opened, and not the schedule, which has to be decided by the UGC and government. A hybrid model of education, instead of going completely offline, will help decongest the campus and hostels," a vice-chancellor told TNIE.

In the meantime, the department has also mandated Covid-19 tests for teaching and non-teaching staff in private, aided and government degree colleges that come under the ambit of the state education department. Personnel in the office of the joint director have also been asked to undergo the test.The official said there is no confirmation whether students will be subject to it before commencement of offline classes. Meanwhile, AICTE has allowed engineering colleges to start the academic session from December 1. It was earlier scheduled for November 1.AICTE has also extended admission deadlines for first-year courses in engineering colleges to November 30. This is owing to "prolonged emergent conditions and requests from state governments and ongoing admission processes of IITs and NITs".

10.8 India's Covid-19 recovery rate touches 90%, only 8.5% of total caseload active

Source: newindianexpress.com,25 October,2020

Kerala continued to report a very high number of fresh cases with more than 8,000, followed by Maharashtra with over 6,000.

NEW DELHI: With a total of 70,78,123 people having recuperated from COVID-19, the national recovery rate for the disease has touched 90 per cent, while 62,077 people have

recovered in a span of 24 hours as against 50,129 new cases of the infection reported in the same period, the Union Health Ministry said on Sunday.

Mobile testing of COVID-19 taking place at Bengaluru's City Market on Monday

This achievement is matched by the downward spiral fall in the number of active COVID-19 cases, which was maintained below the 7-lakh mark for the third successive day, it added.

"The total recoveries exceed active cases by 64,09,969 as on date," it said. Less than 1,000 deaths have been continuously reported for the last one week.

The figure is below the 1,100-mark since October 2, the ministry highlighted. There are "merely" 6,68,154 active COVID-19 cases in the country as on date, which accounts for 8.50 per cent of the total caseload, it said.

75 per cent of the new recoveries were observed to be concentrated in 10 states and Union territories -- Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Maharashtra leads the tally with more than 10,000 single-day recoveries. Also, 79 per cent of the 50,129 fresh COVID-19 cases were reported from 10 states and Union territories.

Kerala continued to report a very high number of fresh cases with more than 8,000, followed by Maharashtra with over 6,000, the ministry said. Besides, 578 COVID-19 fatalities were reported in a span of 24 hours.

Of these, nearly 80 per cent were concentrated in 10 states and Union territories, Maharashtra accounting for the highest of 137. India's COVID-19 testing laboratory

network has inked another achievement. The total number of laboratories has crossed 2,000.

Starting from one laboratory in Pune, the number now stands at 2,003 -- 1,126 government-owned and 877 private -- the ministry stated.

The country's COVID-19 caseload mounted to 78,64,811 with 50,129 new cases reported in a day, while the death toll due to the disease climbed to 1,18,534 with 578 fresh fatalities, data of the ministry updated at 8 am showed.

10.9 Ahmedabad tackles COVID-19 transmission with ban on smokeless tobacco products and spitting in public

Source: who.int,28 October,2020

Recognizing the COVID-19 transmission threat of smokeless tobacco use and spitting in public, Ahmedabad – the largest city in India's western state of Gujarat known for its cotton textiles, street food and diamond cutting – took the decision to close stores selling paan and other chewing tobacco earlier this year.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, smokeless tobacco has become an even greater public health concern than usual. Chewing tobacco products such as gutka, khaini, zarda, paan and paan masala, induce salivation and trigger the urge to spit. The act of spitting can facilitate the spread of infectious diseases, potentially including COVID-19. Another risk associated with smokeless tobacco, is the contact of fingers with the lips or nose during use, which may increase the possibility of virus transmission.

The decision was made not only to reduce the spread of COVID-19 but also to improve the health of the population through reduced use of tobacco products.

Like many countries, India's urban centres have faced the largest COVID-19 outbreaks across the country. In May, five cities: Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Chennai and Thane, made up almost 50% of the national total case count.

On 15 March, before the first reported case in Gujarat and well before the existence of the national directive on smokeless tobacco to contain COVID-19 issued under the Disaster Management Act, Gujarat Chief Secretary Anil Mukim introduced a ban on spitting on roads and in public places. The action was punishable by fine of 500 rupees and once the new order was implemented by the Amdavad Municipal Corporation (AMC), it resulted in 1244 persons fined on the very first day of enforcement. The AMC built on this measure by

increasing the fine to 1000 rupees from 23 March, and issuing police FIRs (first information reports) to those who refused or failed to pay the fine.

"With over 200 million smokeless tobacco users in India, the pandemic presents an opportunity to further strengthen tobacco control policies and interventions to prevent avoidable diseases and deaths," says Dr Roderico H. Ofrin, WHO Representative to India.

These measures follow efforts in recent years to prioritize prevention of tobacco-related cancers and other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in Ahmedabad. As one of 70 cities in the Partnership for Healthy Cities—a global network supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies in partnership with WHO and Vital Strategies—the city had already conducted a population-based household survey of NCD risks prior to the onset of the pandemic. The data from the survey will allow the city to target highly prevalent preventable diseases with evidence-based programs.

10.10 India coronavirus tally crosses 81-lakh mark with 48,648 new COVID-19 infections

Source: zeenews.india.com, 31 October, 2020

The number of active COVID-19 cases remained below 6 lakh for the second consecutive day.

New Delhi: Coronavirus cases in India crossed 81-lakh mark on Saturday (October 31, 2020) with 48,648 fresh COVID-19 infections reported in the last 24 hours. As per the Ministry of health data, India's COVID-19 caseload surged to 81,37,119, while the number of recoveries crossed the 74-lakh mark, pushing the recovery rate to 91.34 per cent.

The country's COVID-19 death toll climbed to 1,21,641 with 551 new fatalities, as per the Ministry of Health data. The case fatality rate has dropped to 1.49 per cent.

The number of active COVID-19 cases remained below 6 lakh for the second consecutive day.

The total coronavirus cases in India include 5,82,649 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country, which comprise 7.16 per cent of the total caseload.

The 551 new fatalities include 127 from Maharashtra, 59 from West Bengal, 49 each from Chhattisgarh and Karnataka, 47 from Delhi and 38 from Tamil Nadu.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5.

It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28,?70 lakh on October 11 and crossed 80 lakh on October 29.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, a total of 10,87,96,064 samples had been tested for COVID-19 till October 30. Of these, 10,67,976 samples were tested on Friday.

Of the total 1,21,641 deaths reported so far in the country, 43,837 are from Maharashtra, followed by 11,140 from Karnataka, 11,091 from Tamil Nadu, 7,007 from Uttar Pradesh, 6,784 from West Bengal, 6,676 from Andhra Pradesh, 6,470 from Delhi, 4,187 from Punjab and 3,711 from Gujarat.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

NOVEMBER 2020

11.1 New COVID-19 deaths, cases registered nearly 30% decline in October, says Centre

Source: firstpost.com,1 November,2020

The country's coronavirus count rose to 81,84,082 on Sunday with 46,963 new cases being recorded in the last 24 hours, as per the 8 am data update from the Union Health Ministry

India has more than 81 lakh coronavirus cases, and is bracing for a possible second wave ahead of a series of religious festivals.

New Delhi: India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 81.84 lakh with October registering a nearly 30 percent decline in both new deaths and cases as compared to September, while total recoveries surged to 74.91 lakh, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 81,84,082 with 46,963 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll climbed to 1,22,111 with 470 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

New infections due to COVID-19 have started to decline steadily since the first week of October.

A total of 18,71,498 cases were reported in October, a decrease from last month's 26,21,418, accounting for about 22.87 percent of the total instances of the viral infection reported in the country so far.

The past month also saw 23,433 lives lost due to the disease, which is around 19.19 percent of the total 1,22,111 deaths recorded so far.

A total of 74,91,513 people have recuperated from COVID-19 so far taking the national recovery rate to 91.54 percent while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.49 percent.

The number of active cases of COVID-19 remained below 6 lakh for the third consecutive day. There are 5,70,458 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country as of date which comprises 6.97 percent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on 7 August, 30 lakh on 23 August, and 40 lakh on 5 September.

It went past 50 lakh on 16 September, 60 lakh on 28 September, 70 lakh on 11 October, and crossed 80 lakh on 29 October.

According to the ICMR, a cumulative total of 10,98,87,303 samples have been tested up to 31 October with 10,91,239 samples being tested on Saturday.

The 470 new fatalities include 74 from Maharashtra, 63 from Chhattisgarh, 57 from West Bengal, 41 from Delhi, and 31 from Tamil Nadu.

A total of 1,22,111 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 43,911 from Maharashtra followed by 11,168 from Karnataka, 11,122 from Tamil Nadu, 7,025 from Uttar Pradesh, 6,841 from West Bengal, 6,690 from Andhra Pradesh, 6,511 from Delhi, 4,203 from Punjab and 3,716 from Gujarat.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 percent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

11.2 Compared with September, October sees 70% drop in Covid-19 cases in PCMC areas

Source: indianexpress.com,2 November,2020

"Till Diwali is over, we cannot say the Covid-19 situation has been fully controlled. But it is true that the situation is improving day by day," said Municipal Commissioner Shravan Hardikar.

According to the PCMC health department, in July, there were close to 22,000 positive cases in Pimpri-Chinchwad.

Compare with September, October recorded a staggering 70 per cent drop in Covid-19 cases in Pimpri-Chinchwad. The civic administration, however, reiterated that it is too early to say the situation is fully under control.

"Till Diwali is over, we cannot say the Covid-19 situation has been fully controlled. But it is true that the situation is improving day by day," said Municipal Commissioner Shravan Hardikar.

According to the PCMC health department, in July, there were close to 22,000 positive cases in Pimpri-Chinchwad. In August, in a sharp rise, the number of positive cases recorded were 28,233 while the situation was similar in September when 28,518 were recorded. In

October, however, 9,026 cases were recorded. By the end of September, the total number of positive cases stood at 78,714, while by the end of October, total cases stood at 87,740.

" October has witnessed a big drop of around 70 per cent. Though the overall positivity rate remains 22 per cent, this month, the positivity rate is just around 8 per cent," Hardikar said.

In September, Pimpri-Chinchwad was reporting 1,000 to 1,300 positive cases daily. In October, between 100 and 300 cases were reported daily. On most days, fewer than 200 cases were reported, said Assistant Municipal Commissioner Anna Bodade.

The PCMC chief said the recovery rate had also improved significantly. "As of now, we have a recovery rate of 95 per cent. The mortality rate remains 1.7 per cent," he said, adding that the doubling rate stood at around 400 days. So far, Pimpri-Chinchwad has reported 1,511 deaths of Covid deaths.

Stating that the civic body had started raising awareness on avoiding the possibility of a second wave of infections, Hardikar said, "The possibility of cases rising during Diwali cannot be ruled out. And, therefore, we have launched an awareness drive to ensure that people maintain distancing and do not mingle under the guise of the festive period. Each person will have to take up the responsibility, only then will we be able to keep coronavirus at bay."

11.3 India's capital New Delhi suffers most toxic air in a year

Source:aljazeera.com,5 November,2020

New Delhi – home to 20 million people – recorded the concentration of poisonous PM2.5 particles at 14 times the safe limit.

New Delhi, the capital city with the worst air quality worldwide, suffered its most toxic day in a year on Thursday, recording the concentration of poisonous PM2.5 particles at 14 times the World Health Organization's safe limit.

A raging coronavirus epidemic, with more than 400,000 confirmed cases in the city of 20 million, has heightened alarm over the health hazard posed by the choking smog, with doctors warning of a sharp increase in respiratory illnesses.

"At this time in Delhi, coronavirus and pollution are causing a major havoc," Arvind Kejriwal, New Delhi's chief minister said in a recorded video on Twitter.

Fog envelopes the skyline in New Delhi

"We are seeing all around the sky is covered with smoke, and because of this, the situation from coronavirus is worsening."

The deadly PM2.5 particles are less than 2.5 microns in diameter, can penetrate the lung barrier and enter the blood system, potentially causing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases including lung cancer, according to WHO.

"Woke up with a feeling that poisonous garbage is stuck in my windpipe," said Rahul Ojha, a resident who tagged government authorities in a tweet, blaming them for inaction.

New Delhi's air pollution typically worsens in October and November due to farmers burning off stubble in surrounding states, traffic fumes and windless days. On Thursday, the federal air quality and weather monitoring agency recorded 4,135 incidents of farm fires – the highest of the season. Firecrackers ignited for a Hindu festival on Wednesday added to the problem, some people said. The average PM2.5 level was 370 per cubic metre of air against the WHO's prescribed safe limit of 25 per cubic metre.

The overall air quality index (AQI), which includes other pollutants besides PM2.5 particles, crossed 460 on a scale of 500, the worst since November 14, 2019. If the air quality stays in the severe zone for 48 hours, authorities could bar vehicles entering New Delhi, shut down

construction, and stop half the cars owned by residents from being driven on roads through an odd-even scheme.

11.4 COVID-19: India records single day rise of over 38,000 new infections, 448 more deaths

Source:newindianexpress.com,10 November,2020

The coronavirus death toll climbed to 1,27,059 with 448 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

Passengers wearing masks arrive at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj train terminus in Mumbai, India, Monday, Nov. 9, 2020

NEW DELHI: The number of new coronavirus infections reported in India in a span of 24 hours dropped below 40,000 for the second time this month, as India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 85.91 lakh while the total number of recoveries neared 80 lakh, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

The COVID-19 caseload increased to 85,91,730 with 38,073 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll climbed to 1,27,059 with 448 fresh fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 79,59,406 pushing the national recovery rate to 92.64 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.48 per cent.

The number of active cases remained below six lakh for the twelfth consecutive day.

There are 5,05,265 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country as on date which comprise 5.88 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5.

It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11 and crossed 80 lakh on October 29.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), a cumulative total of 11,96,15,857 samples have been tested up to November 9 with 10,43,665 samples being tested on Monday.

The 448 new fatalities include 85 from Maharashtra, 71 from Delhi, 56 from West Bengal, 25 from Uttar Pradesh, 22 from Kerala and 20 from Punjab.

Total 1,27,059 deaths reported so far in the country include 45,325 from Maharashtra followed by 11,410 from Karnataka, 11,362 from Tamil Nadu, 7,350 from West Bengal, 7,231 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,060 from Delhi, 6,802 from Andhra Pradesh, 4,338 from Punjab and 3,765 from Gujarat.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

11.5 India reports under 50,000 new daily COVID-19 cases since eight days; active caseload contracts further

Source:newindianexpress.com,15 Novem,ber,2020

There are 4,79,216 active cases of coronavirus as on date which comprise merely 5.44 per cent of the total cases.

NEW DELHI: India has reported less than 50,000 new daily cases of COVID-19 for the eighth continuous day, a trend which assumes wider significance as many countries in Europe and America continue to see a surge in their daily numbers, the Union Health Ministry said on Sunday.

A total of 41,100 persons were found to be infected with COVID-19 in India in a span of 24 hours, while 42,156 people recuperated during the same period, leading to a further contraction of the active caseload.

There are 4,79,216 active cases of coronavirus as on date which comprise merely 5.44 per cent of the total cases.

Last time the daily new cases crossed the 50K threshold was on November 7.

"Apart from the successful dissemination of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour among the varied population groups, this trend assumes wider significance as many countries in Europe and America continue to see a surge in their daily numbers," the ministry said in a statement.

Fifteen states and UTs have COVID-19 cases per million lower than India (6,387).

New recoveries outnumbering new cases every 24-hour cycle has also improved the recovery rate to 93.09 per cent.

The total recovered cases stand at 82,05,728 which exceed active cases by 77,26,512.

The ministry said that 79.91 per cent of the new recovered cases are contributed by ten states and UTs.

With 7,117 people recovering from COVID-19, Delhi saw the most number of recoveries.

Kerala registered 6,793 daily recoveries, while West Bengal reported 4,479 new recoveries.

Ten states and UTs have contributed 82.87 per cent of the new cases of coronavirus infection.

Delhi reported 7,340 cases in the last 24 hours.

Kerala recorded 6,357 new cases, while Maharashtra reported 4,237 new infections in a span of 24 hours, the ministry said.

Of the 447 fatalities that have been reported in a day, 85.01 per cent are from 10 states and UTs, with 23.5 per cent of new fatalities reported from Maharashtra which reported 105 deaths.

Delhi and West Bengal follow with 96 and 53 new deaths, respectively.

Twenty-one states and UTs have deaths per million lower than the national average of 94, the ministry said.

India's COVID-19 caseload mounted to 88,14,579 with 41,100 infections being reported in a day, while the death toll climbed to 1,29,635 with 447 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

11.6 Why Pune is still India's worst Covid-19 metro | India Today Insight

Source: indiatoday.in,18 November,2020

The hurry in reopening as well as poor contact tracing has resulted in a rise in number of cases and deaths

Pune continues to be the worst Covid-19 affected metro city in India, recording the maximum per million cases and deaths in the October 15-November 15 period.

The city has seen 51,857 cases and 1,086 deaths (per million population), with a case fatality rate of 2.1. It has also recorded a 7.3 per cent rise in deaths and 2.5 per cent rise in new cases.

Health workers screen residents of Wagholi, Pune, on August 31

The situation is turning worse after a little improvement in mid-October when the number of cases had started declining. Out of the 15,417 beds reserved for Covid-19 patients, only 6,651 were occupied on October 15. As of November 18, close to 10,000 beds were occupied, a large number among them patients from outside Pune city who came from remote areas. The only silver lining is Pune's recovery rate, which stands at more than 85 per cent. On November 15, 349 patients were critical with 227 on life support.

Attitude problem

Pune had recorded Maharashtra's first Covid-19 case, a couple returning from Dubai, on March 9. Experts believe the local administration's failure in effective contact tracing and isolation cost the city.

Pune got its first dedicated Covid-19 makeshift hospital in September, almost four months after such facilities were set up in Mumbai. A big controversy erupted after it became clear that the makeshift hospital did not have ambulances. The bouncers posted at the entrance made life miserable for the patients' relatives. The local traders forced the administration into letting them open up businesses, even as the city was struggling to upgrade its poor health infrastructure. Businesses started opening saying that 90 per cent of Covid-19 cases were in the slums. The cultural capital of Maharashtra remained mostly silent during the 10-day Ganeshotsav festival. However, that has not helped the city contain the spread of the virus.

Connectivity woes

Travellers started converging in Pune after the Maharashtra government revoked the mandatory pass required for domestic travel in August. It's proximity to Mumbai and Nashik again made Pune a travel junction. The five highways--Mumbai-Pune, Pune-Nashik, Pune-Nagpur, Pune-Kolhapur and Pune-Bengaluru--passing through the city limits saw maximum movement after the lockdown was partially relaxed in August (after four months). All these factors have contributed to the rising number of Covid-19 cases in Pune.

Testing times

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) claims that the number of cases in the city is higher because it is carrying out more tests than Mumbai and Delhi. A serosurvey conducted in October revealed that close to 55 per cent of Pune's 4 million residents was infected, though many of them were asymptomatic. The suburbs like Hadapsar, Dhankawadi and Sinhgad Road were among the most affected. The PMC has screened almost 3.5 million people under the state government's 'My family, my responsibility' scheme. Around 200,000 people were found with co-morbidities in this survey. The PMC officials fear the number of Covid-19 cases might go up further as people have been congregating in large numbers at picnic spots and religious places in the historic city.

11.7 Atmospheric Stock of Carbon Dioxide Remains at Record High in 2020 Despite COVID-19 Lockdowns, Restrictions

Source: weather.com,24 November,2020

Did the COVID-19-induced lockdowns—which shut down almost all non-essential human activities—really offer planet Earth a breather from the build-up of the greenhouse emissions? While many seem to believe so, the truth appears to be entirely different.

According to the latest report by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the pandemic, which forced the global population to remain indoors, may have failed to curb the record levels of greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

Make no mistake: the lockdowns did lead to a temporary cut in the emission of many pollutants and greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide—the long-lived primary greenhouse gas that traps heat in the atmosphere, increases temperatures, and drives more extreme weather, ice melt, sea-level rise, and ocean acidification.

missions from a thermal power station at Sonbhadra district in Uttar Pradesh

However, casting this short-lived effect aside, the overall impact of lockdowns on CO2 concentrations across the globe, which comprises cumulative emissions from the past years, has been no bigger than the normal year-to-year fluctuations in the carbon cycle.

In 2019, CO2 levels underwent a growth spurt that caused the annual global average to breach the significant threshold of 410 parts per million, according to the WMO Greenhouse Gas Bulletin. Now, the Bulletin adds that a similar rise has only continued in 2020 as well.

"We breached the global threshold of 400 parts per million in 2015. And just four years later, we crossed 410 ppm. Such a rate of increase has never been seen in the history of our records. The lockdown-related fall in emissions is just a tiny blip on the long-term graph. We need a sustained flattening of the curve," said WMO Secretary-General Professor Petteri Taalas.

The Global Carbon Project had estimated that the daily CO2 emissions would drop by 17% during the most intense phases of the lockdowns. But now, preliminary estimates indicate that the reduction in the annual global emission has been between 4.2% and 7.5%. Globally, an emission reduction of this scale won't be significant enough to bring down the atmospheric CO2 levels. Therefore, CO2 amounts will continue to go up, though at a slightly reduced pace (0.08-0.23 ppm per year lower).

But does this mean the lockdowns have made zero contributions to our planet's fight against climate change? Professor Taalas believes otherwise, as he added: "The COVID-19 pandemic is not a solution for climate change. However, it does provide us with a platform for more sustained and ambitious climate action to reduce emissions to net-zero through a complete transformation of our industrial, energy and transport systems."

Welcoming the growing commitment to carbon neutrality among countries and businesses, the WMO chief asserted that the needed changes are economically affordable and technically possible, and would affect our everyday life only marginally. "There is no time to lose," he warns.

As per the recent study published last month, the global carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions have dropped by more than 1,500 Million Tonnes (Mt) cumulatively in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period last year. This accounts for a sharp drop of 8.8%—more than the drop witnessed during the economic recessions or World War II. However, this represents only a small speed bump in the growing yearly emission levels and has no measurable impact on the overall atmospheric build-up of carbon dioxide.

11.8 Lockdown in COVID-19 containment zones in Rajasthan

Source: newindianexpress.com,30 November,2020

The government issued guidelines for surveillance, containment and caution for the period of December 1 to December 31.

JAIPUR: Amid a spike in COVID-19 cases, the Rajasthan government has decided to impose lockdown in containment zones till December 31 and increase night curfew from 11 to 13 districts of the state.

The government issued guidelines for surveillance, containment and caution for the period of December 1 to December 31.

Taking in account the prevailing COVID-19 scenario in the state, it has been decided to force lockdown in containment zones till December 31, according to the order issued on Sunday night.

"Effective demarcation of containment zones is key to break the chain of transmission controlling the virus.

The zones will be demarcated by collectors following guidelines issued by the Government of India.

Only essential services will be allowed in these areas and intensive house-to-house surveillance be conducted," Principal Secretary, Home, Abhay Kumar, said in the guidelines.

The state government has increased the number of districts from 8 to 13, where the night curfew will be imposed from 8 pm to 6 am.

Kota, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Udaipur, Ajmer, Alwar, Bhilwara, Nagaur, Pali, Tonk, Sikara and Ganganagar are the districts where the night curfew has been imposed.

However, it will not be applicable on factories with production of continuous nature and having night shift, IT companies, chemist shops, marriage etc.

"Rajasthan is at a critical juncture in its fight against COVID-19.

Over the last few weeks, the number of new cases has been rising.

The confluence of certain factors such as recent festival season, onset of winter and laxity in observance of the COVID-19 guidelines pose the risk of the situation becoming aggravated, thus putting a strain on the health infrastructure," he said.

Schools, colleges, educational and coaching institutes will remain close till December 31.

Also, cinema halls, theatres, entertainment parks, social or religious, or any large congregation is not permitted.

Rajasthan reported 18 coronavirus deaths and 2,518 fresh cases on Sunday, taking the total number of fatalities and positive cases to 2,292 and 2,65,386, a health bulletin stated.

DECEMBER 2020

12.1 After Delhi, Gujarat reduces COVID-19 test prices to ₹ 800 from ₹ 1,500 for private labs

Source: businessinsider.in,1 December,2020

Ahmedabad, The Gujarat government on Tuesday reduced the price of RT-PCR tests conducted by private laboratories for COVID-19 to ₹ 800 from ₹ 1,500.

Deputy chief minister Nitin Patel told reporters here that since the prices of test kits have come down, the state government decided to pass on this benefit to people.

"From today, the government-authorised private laboratories will charge ₹ 800 for an RT-PCR test, a reduction of ₹ 700 from the current rate," Patel said.

The prices of test kits have come down following large scale production, he said. If a laboratory assistant is called at home to collect samples, the charge for the RT-PCR test will be ₹ 1,100, he said, adding that labs charge ₹ 2,000 for the home collection service at present.
The decision to slash the test rates was taken by the government's core group under the guidance of Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, he said.

The Aam Aadmi Party government in Delhi and the Congress-led government in Rajasthan also recently announced reduction in the prices of RT-PCR tests.

12.2 Coronavirus Highlights: India's COVID-19 Tally At 94.62 Lakh With 31,118 Cases In A Day

Source: ndtv.com, 2 December,2020

COVID-19 India Latest New Highlights: India, which reported its first case on January 30, is the second worst-hit country in the world by the pandemic after the United States.

Coronavirus Cases In India: Total active cases now stand at around 4.46 lakh

New Delhi:

India recorded 31,118 new coronavirus cases, the lowest daily tally since November 17, data from the health ministry showed on Tuesday.

India now has 94.62 lakh COVID-19 infections, but the number of new daily cases has stayed below the 50,000 mark since November 7 despite a busy festival season last month.

Deaths rose by 482, bringing the total to 137,621.

India, which reported its first case on January 30, is the second worst-hit country in the world by the pandemic after the United States.

Meanwhile, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Monday said that up to 30 crore Indians would be inoculated against COVID-19 by August 2021 according to the central government's plans. However, he also reiterated the need to follow appropriate protocols to fight off the disease.

Distributing masks and soaps at the Old Delhi Railway Station today, the minister, who is also Chairman of the Indian Red Cross Society, said the vaccine will be available before the middle of next year in India.

"In the first 3-4 months of next year, there is a possibility we will be able to provide vaccine to the people of the country. By July-August, we have a plan to provide vaccines to around 25-30 crore people and we are preparing accordingly," Mr Vardhan told reporters.

12.3 Active COVID-19 caseload in India falls below four lakh, 32,981 new cases

Source: newindianexpress.com,7 December,2020

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 96,77,203 with 32,981 new infections being reported in a day and the death toll rose to 1,40,573 with 391 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

BBMP health workers conduct free COVID-19 test at KR Market in Bengaluru on Sunday

NEW DELHI: India's coronavirus infections rose to 96.77 lakh, while the active caseload fell below 4 lakh and the recoveries surged to 91.39 lakh, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 96,77,203 with 32,981 new infections being reported in a day and the death toll rose to 1,40,573 with 391 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

There are 3,96,729 active coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 4.10 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 91,39,901 pushing the national recovery rate to 94.45 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5.

It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, and surpassed 90 lakh on November 20.

According to the ICMR, 14,77,87,656 samples have been tested up to December 6 with 8,01,081 samples being tested on Sunday.

The 391 new fatalities include 69 from Delhi, 46 from West Bengal, 40 from Maharashtra, 28 from Kerala, 24 each from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and 20 from Punjab.

A total of 1,40,573 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 47,734 from Maharashtra followed by 11,856 from Karnataka, 11,793 from Tamil Nadu, 9,646 from Delhi, 8,72 from West Bengal, 7,924 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,033 from Andhra Pradesh, 4,916 from Punjab, 4,081 from Gujarat and 3,337 from Madhya Pradesh.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

12.4 India's total COVID-19 active caseload drops to 3.63 lakh, lowest in 146 days

Source: newindianexpress.com,11 December,2020

Kerala reported the highest daily new cases at 4,470 and is followed by Maharashtra with 3,824 cases.

Guard with a PPE kit at the Entarnce of Ghousia Covid 19 Maternity Hospital ward in Bengaluru on Wednesday

NEW DELHI: India's total COVID-19 active caseload has dropped to 3.63 lakh (3,63,749), the lowest in 146 days, and comprises just 3.71 per cent of the total coronavirus infections, the Union health ministry said on Friday.

The total active cases were 3,58,692 on July 18.

"The country has reported a trend of sustained decrease in the number of active cases. India's present active caseload consists of just 3.71 per cent of India's total cases," the ministry said.

It said that 37,528 people recovered from COVID-19 in a span of 24 hours and this led to a net decline of 8,544 cases from the total active caseload.

"India's total active caseload has significantly dropped to 3.63 lakh (3,63,749) today. This is the lowest after 146 days. The total active cases were 3,58,692 on 18th July, 2020," it said.

The country has registered 29,398 new cases in a span of 24 hours, the ministry said and added that total recoveries are nearing 93 lakh (92,90,834).

"The gap between recoveries and active cases, that is steadily increasing, has crossed 89 lakh today and presently, stands at 89,27,085," the ministry highlighted.

The difference in the new recoveries outnumbering new cases has also improved the national COVID-19 recovery rate to 94.84 per cent, as on date, it said.

The ministry said that 79.90 per cent of new recovered cases were observed to be concentrated in 10 states and union territories (UTs) -- Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Delhi, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.

Karnataka has reported the highest single-day recoveries at 5,076, while 5,068 people recovered in Maharashtra followed by 4,847 in Kerala.

In average daily recovered cases in the past one week, Maharashtra recorded the highest at 6,703, followed by Kerala and Delhi with 5,173 and 4,362 recovered cases, respectively, according to ministry data.

Of the new cases, 72.39 per cent are concentrated in Kerala, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Haryana.

Kerala reported the highest daily new cases at 4,470 and is followed by Maharashtra with 3,824 cases.

The ministry said that 414 case fatalities have been reported in a span of 24 hours.

Ten states and UTs -- Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan -- account for 79.95 per cent of the new deaths.

Maharashtra saw the highest casualties (70).

Delhi and West Bengal follow with 61 and 49 daily deaths, respectively, the ministry said.

India's total coronavirus cases mounted to 97,96,769 with 29,398 infections being reported in a day, while the death toll rose to 1,42,186 with 414 new fatalities, the ministry data updated at 8 am showed.

12.5 Govt says COVID cases, deaths declining in India; cautions against any laxity

Source: newindianexpress.com,15 December,2020

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said that more than 15.55 crore tests have been conducted so far for detection of coronavirus infection in the country.

A health worker collects swab sample of a passenger for the COVID-19 test at the KSRTC bus stand in Bengaluru

NEW DELHI: COVID-19 cases and deaths are declining in India which is very reassuring, the Centre said on Tuesday but cautioned against any laxity saying an overwhelming proportion of the country''s population is still "very very susceptible" to the virus and the situation may escalate unexpectedly.

While there is a continuous increasing trend in COVID-19 cases and deaths globally, particularly in America and Europe and the situation in the world is becoming worrisome, in contrast the scene in India is satisfying as the cases and deaths are declining, Dr V K Paul, member (health) at NITI Aayog, told a press conference here.

"Mortality is declining and it is well below 400 per day. Cases have come down to almost 22,000. This is the kind of number we all experienced in July. So that is very reassuring. As a nation, we seem to be now doing very well.

"We are saving lives. But remember, this cannot be taken for granted. An overwhelming proportion of our population is still very very susceptible to the virus. And the situation can escalate unexpectedly," Paul said while cautioning against any laxity.

He further said the reassuring thing is that people are saying the R0 has come below one which means the pandemic is shrinking.

"So we should be happy about that but cautiously happy," he said.

Noting Delhi has made progress, he said, "We congratulate the government of Delhi as also all the other governments who have done so well in contributing towards such a significant control (in cases) in recent times."

Paul, however, expressed concern over the COVID-19 situation in some states like Uttarakhand, Nagaland and Himachal Pradesh and stated all efforts to control the spread are being made in collaboration with these governments.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said that more than 15.55 crore tests have been conducted so far for detection of coronavirus infection in the country, and the cumulative positivity rate has come down to 6.37 while the average daily positivity rate during last week was 3.00 per cent.

India's Case Fatality Rate (CFR) is also among the lowest in the world. At present, India''s CFR is 1.45 per cent, whereas globally it is 2.26 per cent, Bhushan said.

Speaking about the preparation for the COVID-19 vaccination drive, Bhushan said guidelines for estimation of electrical and non-electrical cold chain equipment and their strengthening have been issued to states.

Guidelines for management of cold chain at last cold chain points and session sites have been issued.

At least 29,000 cold chain points, 240 walk-in coolers, 70 walk-in freezers, 45,000 ice-lined refrigerators, 41,000 deep freezers and 300 solar refrigerators will be used for the COVID-19 vaccination drive.

States have been asked to identify at least one adverse event following immunisation (AEFI) management centre in each block.

"Adverse events following immunisation is a critical aspect. Even during universal immunisation programmes, which have been going on for decades, some adverse effects are seen in children and pregnant women after vaccination.

"So, we can''t deny the possibility of an adverse event when the COVID-19 vaccination begins. The countries where inocolution has already started, especially in the UK, adverse events took place on the very first day. So, it is essential that states and union territories prepare for this too," Bhushan said.

Detailed instructions on infection prevention and control practices during vaccination and management of minor, severe, serious adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) have been issued to states.

12.6 As Data Shows Clear Trends of Recovery, India Records One Crore COVID-19 Cases in 323 Days

Source: weather.com,19 December,2020

Crossing a major milestone, the COVID-19 pandemic entered the eight-figure mark in India on Saturday as the country witnessed 25,152 new coronavirus cases and 347 deaths. The total number of infected people since January crossed the one crore-mark and now stands at 10,004,599, according to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's data. The country crossed the grim milestone almost eleven months—or 323 days—after the first case was reported on January 30 in Thrissur district of Kerala. Since then, India has recorded 1,45,136 deaths due to the pandemic.

India has been recording the second-highest numbers of coronavirus cases in the world since August this year, following the US, which had crossed the milestone of one crore infections on November 9. Currently, the US has recorded 1.75 crore infections and 3.13 lakh deaths so far and continues to report more than 2 lakh cases every single day.

Taming the pandemic

India also fought through a massive wave of infection in August and September, with the pandemic peaking at a highest single-day spike of 97,894 cases on September 16. The number of cases has come down sharply ever since with a remarkable recovery rate of 95.46 per cent so far. The death rate in India continues to remain low at 1.45 per cent and the active caseload also remains below four lakh in the last 12 days.

Deaths per million is another parameter where India stands top in the world with just 104 deaths per million. The Times of India reports that only Indonesia, at 71, has a lower rate of deaths per million than India among the top 20 worst-affected countries.

According to the Health Ministry, the chasm between active cases and recovered cases is continuously widening. As many as 95,50,712 people have recovered so far while 3,08,751 remain currently active. A total of 16,00,90,514 samples have been tested for COVID-19 till date, as per the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) data.

The number of infections had crossed the 10 lakh-mark on July 17—168 days since the first case. The country crossed 20 lakh just 21 days later on August 7; 30 lakh on August 23; 40 lakh on September 5; 50 lakh on September 16; 60 lakh on September 28; 70 lakh on October 11; 80 lakh on October 29; and 90 lakh on November 20. The last ten lakh infections were, fortunately, the slowest growth since the first ten lakh, showing a clear and definite sign of slow down.

Maharashtra remains worst-affected

Maharashtra continues to be the worst-hit state with a caseload of 18,88,767 (19% of overall India's cases) till date. Over 80 per cent of the active cases are being reported by 10 states and a union territory— Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, and Tamil Nadu.

Over 75 per cent of the deaths are being reported from Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. After a massive spike between July and Septemeber, southern states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh have seen a sharp fall in the number of cases and now contribute to less than a quarter of the country's overall caseload.

As per the nationwide serosurvey in August, 6.6% of Indians aged 10 and above could have had the infection in the past, meaning the total caseload in the country could have already breached seven crore in India. Among the 10 worst-hit countries, India and Argentina are the only two that are yet to see a second surge and with vaccines on the anvil, experts are optimistic that India may never see a second wave comparable to what we say during August and September.

India anxiously waits for vaccines

There is, however, a light at the end of the tunnel as India has eight COVID-19 vaccine candidates, including three indigenous vaccines, under different stages of clinical trials which could be ready for authorization in near future. In Europe and the US, vaccination with Pfizer and Moderna's doses is already underway.

AstraZeneca and Oxford university's vaccine being manufactured in India by the Serum Institute of India-Covishield; Bharat Biotech Limited's Covaxin; Zydus Cadila' ZyCoV-D and Russian vaccine candidate Sputnik-V are the front-runners preparing for an emergency authorisation for frontline health workers and vulnerable people in India.

The list also contains NVX-CoV2373 by SII, HGCO19 by Geneva, and two unlabeled vaccines—Recombinant Protein antigen-based vaccine by Biological E Limited and Inactivated rabies vector platform by Bharat Biotech.

The central government plans to vaccinate nearly 30 crore people during the first phase of vaccination. It will be offered to one crore healthcare workers along with 2 crore frontline and essential workers and 27 crore elderly, mostly above the age of 50 years with comorbidities such as diabetes, heart or liver ailments.

12.7 Two Passengers From UK Test COVID-19 Positive At Kolkata Airport

Source: businessworld.in,22 December,2020

Kolkata (West Bengal) [India], December 22 (ANI): Two passengers, who arrived from the UK, tested positive for COVID-19 at Kolkata airport on Sunday, the airport officials said on

Tuesday.

The news came amid rising concerns over the discovery of a new strain of coronavirus in the UK.

Meanwhile, five out of 266 passengers and crew members of a London to Delhi flight have tested positive for coronavirus, an official said."Five out of 266 passengers and crew members of a flight which arrived at Delhi airport from London last night have tested positive for COVID-19. Their samples have been sent to NCDC for research and they have been sent to the care centre," said a Nodal officer for COVID-19. India will temporarily suspend all flight operations between India and the UK from 11.59 pm today till December 31, 2020.

"There are reports from the United Kingdom that new virus strain is spreading at an alarming rate. Therefore, we have decided from 23.59 hours of December 22 that all flights to and from the UK will be temporarily suspended till 31 December 2020," Union Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said yesterday.

On December 20, Prime Minister Boris Johnson had informed the public that a new variant of the COVID-19 virus has been found in the UK. "Given the early evidence we have on this new variant of the virus, and the potential risk it poses, it is with a heavy heart that I must tell you we cannot continue with Christmas as planned," he had tweeted. (ANI)

12.8 Telangana: Sixteen who returned from the UK test positive for COVID-19

Source: indianexpress.com,26 December,2020

The department has activated its surveillance teams for tracing and testing those who have returned from or via the UK to prevent the spread of the virus. Their health condition is continuously monitored.

Nine more people who returned to Telangana from the UK in the last two weeks have been tested positive for Covid-19, taking the total number of the UK returnees infected with the virus to 16. Their samples are preserved and sent to CSIR-Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology(CCMB) for examining their genome sequencing.

Till now, 962 out of 1200 people returned to the state since December 9, 2020, have been identified, Telangana Health department said. Out of the identified people tested for Covid-19, 16 tested positive. Follow Covid-19 India Live Updates here

Among the positive cases, four each are from Hyderabad and Medchal-Malkajgiri districts. Two are from Jagtial, and one each from Mancherial, Nalgonda, Rangareddy, Sangareddy, Siddipet, and Warangal urban districts. All 16 persons are put up in special wards, as per the latest guidelines of the government of India, in different hospitals.

Telangana Health Minister Eatala Rajender chairs a meeting with officials over the Covid-19 situation in the state

The Health Department is on a high alert in the wake of growing concerns over the emergence of a new variant of coronavirus in certain countries. The department has activated its surveillance teams for tracing and testing those who have returned from or via the UK to prevent the spread of the virus. Their health condition is continuously monitored.

Apart from the 16 who tested positive, another 76 people in close contact with the positive patients have been kept under quarantine. The results of their samples sent to CCMB is expected in two days, said Dr. G Sreenivasa Rao, the director of Public Health, Telangana.

The department has appealed to people who have travelled from or via the UK after December 9 to voluntarily share their details by calling up 040-24651119 or by texting on WhatsApp to 9154170960. Staff from the health department will visit their homes to conduct health check-ups.

Rao also said that people need not panic over the new variant of the virus but should stay alert and follow all safety protocols such as wearing a mask, maintaining physical distancing, and ensuring personal hygiene as before.

12.9 India may extend ban on flights from UK, says Hardeep Singh Puri

Source: hindustantimes.com,29 December,2020

India last week suspended all flights from Britain until the end of the month. The new variant of the virus detected in Britain has triggered widespread concern and travel restrictions across the world.

Union Minister for Civil Aviation Hardeep Singh Puri addresses a press conference at National Media Centre, in New Delhi

India is likely to extend the ban on flights from Britain in a bid to contain the spread of a new strain of coronavirus, civil aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Tuesday.

"I foresee a slight extension of the temporary suspension. I don't expect that extension to be a long or indefinite extension. In the next day or two, we will find out if any additional steps need to be taken, or when we can start easing the current temporary suspension," Hardeep Singh Puri said.

India had suspended all flights from Britain last week until the end of the month as the new variant of the virus detected in the United Kingdom triggered widespread concern and travel restrictions across the world.

"Considering the prevailing situation in the UK, the government of India has decided that all flights originating from the UK to India shall be temporarily suspended till December 31, 2020 (11.59pm). This suspension will start from 11.59pm, December 22, 2020," the ministry had announced.

The Union health ministry said on Tuesday all international passengers who have arrived in India during the last 14 days - from December 9 to December 22 this year, if symptomatic and tested positive for the coronavirus disease will have to undergo genome sequencing.

The variant of the coronavirus, which could be up to 70% more transmissible, is spreading rapidly in Britain and is not thought to be more deadly or to cause more serious illness, according to prime minister Boris Johnson and his board of scientific advisors.

Governments around the world are also taking action as a fast-spreading variant sweeps through South Africa, with the UK banning flights from that country. Hong Kong banned all recent travellers from South Africa and extended a mandatory quarantine for most other visitors in an attempt to prevent a spread of Covid-19 cases in the city.

12.10 COVID-19: Maharashtra Extends Lockdown Restrictions Till January 31

Source: businessworld.in,30 December,2020

Mumbai (Maharashtra) [India], December 30 (ANI): In light of the new strain of the COVID-19 found in the UK, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday extended the lockdown till January 31.

The state government on November 27 had issued an order for the imposition of the lockdown till December 31.As per the order, the lockdown was ordered under Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 to operationalize 'Mission Begin Again' - an effort to open up the state after several months of lockdowns due to the coronavirus.

The government had earlier allowed district collectors to impose night curfew in their respective jurisdictions after taking prior permission from the chief secretary of the state. "Night curfew (not more than 5 persons to assemble between 11 PM to 6 AM) will be in force from December 22 till January 5, 2021 in the limits of all municipal corporations of the state.

The concerned competent authorities to issue necessary directions regarding the same in their respective jurisdictions," a press release by the Department of Revenue and Forest, Disaster Management, Relief and Rehabilitation said.

Maharashtra on Tuesday reported 3,018 new COVID-19 cases, 5,572 discharges, and 68 deaths, as per State Health Department. The total number of cases now stands at 19,25,066, including 18,20,021 recoveries, 55,672 active cases, and 49,373 deaths. The Recovery rate in the state is 94.54 per cent. (ANI)

JANUARY 2020

COVID – 19 - Global News

13.1 Novel Coronavirus – China

Source: who.int,12 January,2020

On 11 and 12 January 2020, WHO received further detailed information from the National Health Commission about the outbreak.

WHO is reassured of the quality of the ongoing investigations and the response measures implemented in Wuhan, and the commitment to share information regularly.

The evidence is highly suggestive that the outbreak is associated with exposures in one seafood market in Wuhan. The market was closed on 1 January 2020. At this stage, there is no infection among healthcare workers, and no clear evidence of human to human transmission. The Chinese authorities continue their work of intensive surveillance and follow up measures, as well as further epidemiological investigations.

Among the 41 confirmed cases, there has been one death. This death occurred in a patient with serious underlying medical conditions.

China shared the genetic sequence of the novel coronavirus on 12 January, which will be of great importance for other countries to use in developing specific diagnostic kits.

The cluster was initially reported on 31 December 2019, when the WHO China Country Office was informed. The Chinese authorities identified a new type of coronavirus (novel coronavirus, nCoV), which was isolated on 7 January 2020. Laboratory testing was conducted on all suspected cases identified through active case finding and retrospective review. Other respiratory pathogens such as influenza, avian influenza, adenovirus, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) were ruled out as the cause.

According to information conveyed to WHO by Chinese authorities on 11 and 12 January, 41 cases with novel coronavirus infection have been preliminarily diagnosed in Wuhan City. Of the 41 cases reported, seven are severely ill. This is when the one death, mentioned above, was reported, in a patient with other underlying health conditions. Six patients have been discharged from hospital. Symptom onset of the 41 confirmed nCoV cases ranges from 8 December 2019 to 2 January 2020. No additional cases have been detected since 3 January 2020.

The clinical signs and symptoms reported are mainly fever, with a few cases having difficulty in breathing, and chest radiographs showing invasive pneumonic infiltrates in both lungs. National authorities report that patients have been isolated and are receiving treatment in Wuhan medical institutions.

According to the preliminary epidemiological investigation, most cases worked at or were handlers and frequent visitors to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. The government reports that there is no clear evidence that the virus passes easily from person to person.

Currently, no case with infection of this novel coronavirus has been reported elsewhere other than Wuhan.

Public Health Response

China's National Health Commission has deployed a group of experts to Wuhan City to support the local response.

National authorities have reported the following response measures:

A total of 763 close contacts including healthcare workers, have been identified and followed up and no additional cases of infection with the novel coronavirus have been identified;

The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission carried out active case finding, and retrospective investigations of the current cluster of patients have been completed

The Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market has been temporarily closed to carry out environmental sanitation and disinfection;

Public risk communication activities have been carried out to improve public awareness and adoption of self-protection measures.

WHO is closely monitoring the situation and is in regular contact with national authorities in China to provide support required. Technical guidance on novel coronavirus has been developed and will continue to be updated as additional information is available.

WHO risk assessment

To date, investigations are still under way to assess the full extent of the outbreak.

Wuhan city is a major domestic and international transport hub. To date, there have been no reported cases outside of Wuhan City.

More comprehensive information and ongoing investigations are also required to better understand the epidemiology, clinical picture, source, modes of transmission, and extent of infection; as well as the countermeasures implemented.

WHO advice

Based on information provided by national authorities, WHO's recommendations on public health measures and surveillance for novel coronaviruses apply.

WHO does not recommend any specific health measures for travellers. In case of symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness either during or after travel, travellers are encouraged to seek medical attention and share travel history with their healthcare provider. Travel guidance has been updated.

WHO advises against the application of any travel or trade restrictions on China based on the information currently available on this event.

13.2 Coronavirus death toll at 213; WHO declares global health emergency

Source: pharmaceutical-technology.com,31 January,2020

As of the end of 30 January, the death toll from the coronavirus outbreak has reached 213, and the number of infected cases soared to 9,776.

WHO declared coronavirus outbreak as a public health emergency. Credit: U.S. Mission Geneva / Eric Bridiers

As of the end of 30 January, the death toll from the coronavirus outbreak reached 213, and the number of infected cases soared to 9,776.

While hundreds of people are affected by the coronavirus every day, some infected patients are also recovering after undergoing treatment for their symptoms. A total of 187 people have recovered so far.

To date, 22 countries outside China have confirmed infected cases, with the Philippines, India and Italy joining the list reporting their first cases of coronavirus infection on 30 January.

Coronavirus a public health emergency: WHO

Following a meeting on 30 January, an emergency committee by the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the coronavirus outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).

WHO first convened on 22 January but postponed its decision to 23 January after the emergency committee members expressed split opinions on the outbreak's emergency status.

During its second meeting on 23 January, the committee decided the situation was too early to declare a PHEIC. Since then, the number of coronavirus deaths and infections continued to surge, gradually spreading to different parts of the world.

In the latest discussions, the committee reviewed the outbreak's severity, agreeing that it now calls for a PHEIC.

A statement from WHO read: "The committee believes that it is still possible to interrupt virus spread, provided that countries put in place strong measures to detect disease early, isolate and treat cases, trace contacts, and promote social distancing measures commensurate with the risk.

"It is important to note that as the situation continues to evolve, so will the strategic goals and measures to prevent and reduce spread of the infection."

More: Five recent global health emergencies declared by the WHO

WHO recommendations to combat coronavirus

The WHO committee provided temporary recommendations to combat the outbreak and highlighted the need for identifying the animal source of the coronavirus.

It also called for improved observation outside Hubei to gain further insights into possible local cycles of transmission.

Furthermore, the committee noted the need for the development and access to potential vaccines, diagnostics, antiviral drugs and other therapeutics for low and middle-income countries.

Previous global health emergencies by WHO

Previously, WHO declared H1N1, Poliovirus, Ebola and Zika outbreaks as public health emergencies of international concern.

H1N1 was the first PHEIC declared by WHO in 2009, followed by Poliovirus and Ebola in 2014, Zika in 2016, while the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo was declared in 2019.

As of 21 January, a total of 3,416 Ebola cases were reported, including 3,297 confirmed and 119 suspected cases. A total of 2,238 people died due to the latest Ebola virus disease outbreak, representing a 66% overall case fatality ratio.

WHO reported 35 new Ebola confirmed cases in 2020 (between 01 January to 21 January) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

FEBRUARY 2020

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)

Help us to help you

Incorporate mindfulness and meditation into your regular routine
Reduce anxiety and stress
If you've never tried it before, now's your chance

Together we will fight COVID-19

For information related to COVID-19
Call the State helpline numbers or Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India's 24x7 helpline numbers
1075 (Toll Free) or 011-23978046, Email at ncov2019@gov.in , ncov2019@gmail.com

14.1 Coronavirus disease named Covid-19

Source: bbc.com,11 February,2020

The World Health Organization says the official name for the disease caused by the new coronavirus is Covid-19.

"We now have a name for the disease and it's Covid-19," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters in Geneva.

It comes after the death toll from the virus passed 1,000. Tens of thousands of people have been infected.

Dr Ghebreyesus called on the world to fight the new virus as aggressively as possible.

The word coronavirus refers to the group of viruses it belongs to, rather than the latest strain.

The virus itself has been designated SARS-CoV-2 by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses.

Researchers have been calling for an official name to avoid confusion and stigmatisation of any group or country.

"We had to find a name that did not refer to a geographical location, an animal, an individual or group of people, and which is also pronounceable and related to the disease," the WHO chief said.

"Having a name matters to prevent the use of other names that can be inaccurate or stigmatising. It also gives us a standard format to use for any future coronavirus outbreaks."

The new name is taken from the words "corona", "virus" and "disease", with 2019 representing the year that it emerged (the outbreak was reported to the WHO on 31 December).

There are now more than 42,200 confirmed cases across China. The number of deaths has overtaken that of the Sars epidemic in 2002-2003.

On Monday, some 103 people died in Hubei province alone, a daily record, and the national death toll is now 1,016.

But the number of new infections nationally was down almost 20% from the day before, from 3,062 to 2,478.

More than 42,000 cases in China so far

Total confirmed cases of coronavirus

42,694 cases

1,017 deaths

China National Health Commission, BBC Research, 11 Feb

BBC
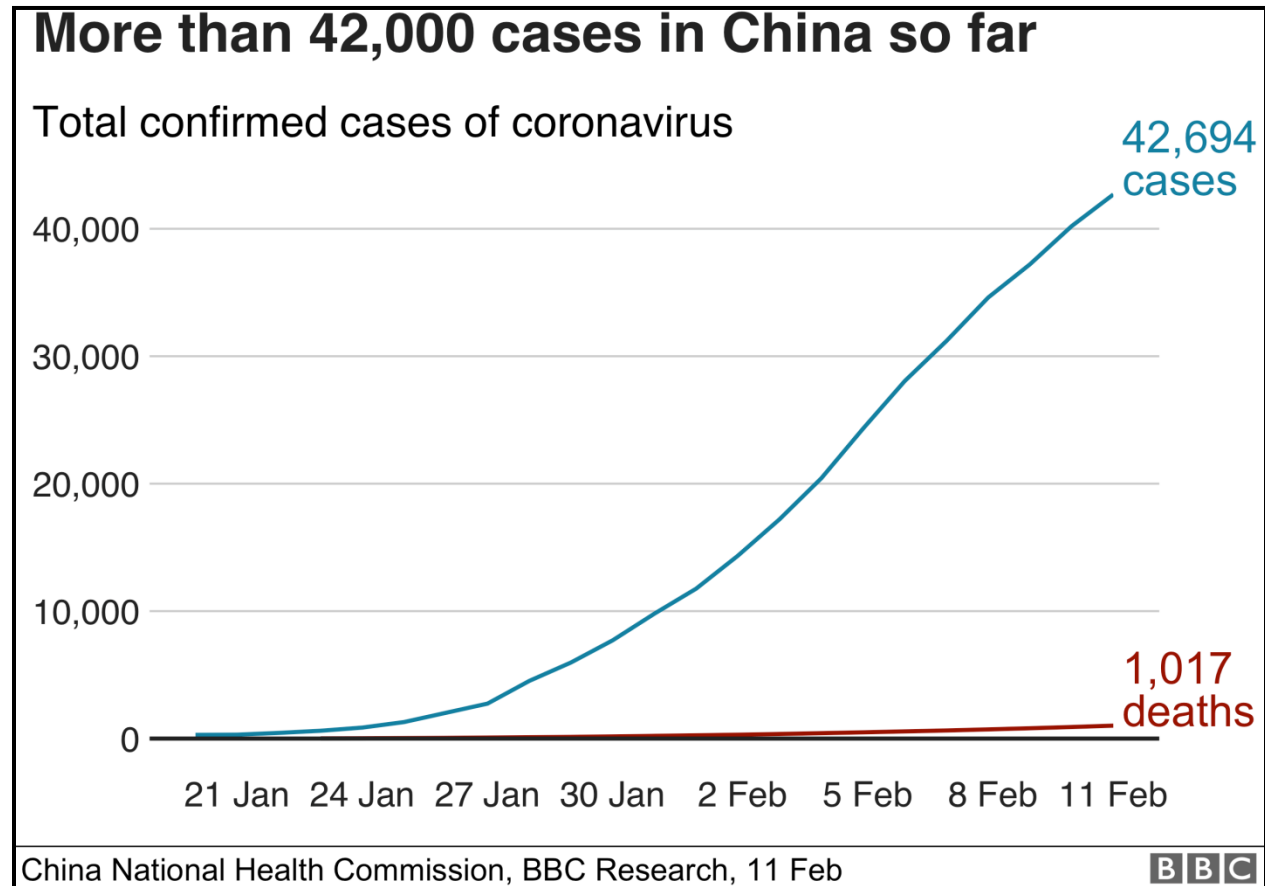
In recent days, Chinese authorities have increasingly been criticised for their handling of the crisis when the cases first emerged.

The death of a doctor whose early warnings were suppressed by authorities sparked widespread public anger.

Beijing has now "removed" several senior officials over their actions to control the disease.

The party secretary for the Hubei Health Commission, and the head of the commission, were among those who lost their jobs. They are the most senior officials to be demoted so far.

The central government has also sent a team from its highest anti-corruption agency to Hubei to investigate the treatment of Dr Li by police.

Scientists from around the world are meeting in Geneva to discuss ways to combat the outbreak.

Dr Ghebreyesus of the WHO said there was still a realistic chance of containing the disease if enough resources were devoted to the fight.

Cases of coronavirus outside China
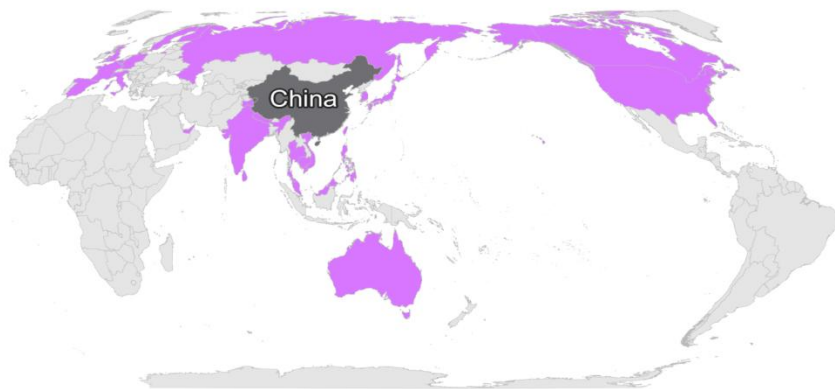
Country	Cases	Country	Cases	Country	Cases	Country	Cases
Japan*	161	Singapore	45	Thailand	32	South Korea	28
Taiwan	18	Malaysia	18	Australia	15	Vietnam	15
Germany	14	US	13	France	11	UAE	8
UK	8	Canada	7	India	3	Philippines	3
Italy	3	Russia	2	Spain	2	Cambodia	1
Finland	1	Nepal	1	Sri Lanka	1	Sweden	1
Belgium	1						

* figure includes 135 cases on board a cruise ship off the Japanese coast

Source: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Updated: 11 Feb BBC

He praised the measures being taken in China, which he said were "slowing the spread to the rest of the world". The US Federal Reserve meanwhile has warned that disruption to the Chinese economy could spill over and affect the rest of the world.

14.2 Coronavirus outbreak 'just beginning' outside China, says expert

Source: reuters.com,12 February,2020

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - The coronavirus epidemic may be peaking in China where it was first detected in the central city of Wuhan but it is just beginning in the rest of the world and likely to spread, a global expert on infectious diseases said on Wednesday.

The Chinese government's senior medical adviser has said the disease is hitting a peak in China and may be over by April. He said he was basing the forecast on mathematical modelling, recent events and government action.

Dale Fisher, chair of the Global Outbreak Alert & Response Network that is coordinated by the World Health Organization, said that predicted "time course" may well be true if the virus is allowed to run free in Wuhan.

"It's fair to say that's really what we are seeing," he told Reuters in an interview. "But it has spread to other places where it's the beginning of the outbreak. In Singapore, we are at the beginning of the outbreak."

The flu-like virus has killed more than 1,100 people and infected nearly 45,000, predominantly in China and mostly in Wuhan.

Singapore has reported 50 coronavirus cases, one of the highest tallies outside China, including mounting evidence of local transmission.

"I'd be pretty confident though that eventually every country will have a case," Fisher said.

Asked why there were so many cases in Singapore, he said there were comparatively more tests being conducted on the island.

"We have a very low index of suspicion for testing people so...we do have higher ascertainment," he said, but added that there was a lot about transmission of the virus yet to be understood.

Kenneth Mak, director of medical services at Singapore's health ministry, told a news conference it was difficult to be confident in projections that the epidemic will peak in China this month but, in any case, peaks in other countries will lag China by one or two months.

Fisher said there was no justification for the kind of panic buying of essentials like rice and toilet rolls seen in Singapore.

"There's no suggestion we are going to run out of anything," he said. "I would just stay level-headed."

He said the elderly and those with diabetes were most at risk of serious illness.

"For the vast majority of people it will just be a mild illness but still treat it with respect," Fisher said.

14.3 'This is a time for facts, not fear,' says WHO chief as COVID-19 virus spreads

Source: news.un.org ,15 February,2020

Emergency room nurses wear face masks at Second People's Hospital of Shenzhen in China.

As the number of coronavirus cases reportedly passed 60,000, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told foreign policy and security experts gathered for the Munich Security Conference that the UN agency was encouraged that there has not yet been widespread community transmission of the virus, now named COVID-19, outside of China.

WHO was also encouraged that "the global research community has come together to identify and accelerate the most urgent research needs for diagnostics, treatments and vaccines", and that a team of international experts is now on the ground in China, working

closely with Chinese counterparts to understand the outbreak, and to inform the next steps in the global response.

The virus emerged in central China in late December and the latest figures show it has infected more than 63,000 people and has killed some 1,300 patients, mostly in China. The WHO has classified COVID-19 a global health threat.

"The steps China has taken to contain the outbreak at its source appear to have bought to the world time," Mr. Tedros said.

But 'we don't know how much time'

The WHO chief said the agency's encouragement was tempered by several key concerns, including, the rising number of cases in China, particularly the number of health workers that have been infected; the lack of urgency in funding the response from the international community; the levels of rumours and misinformation hampering the response; and the potential havoc the virus could wreak in countries with weaker health systems.

"The outbreaks of Ebola and COVID-19 underscore once again the vital importance for all countries to invest in preparedness and not panic," said Mr. Tedros, recalling that two years ago, WHO and the World Bank founded the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, an independent body to assess the state of the world's readiness for a pandemic.

He said that last year, the board had published its first report, which concluded the world remains badly prepared.

"For too long, the world has operated on a cycle of panic and neglect. We throw money at an outbreak, and when it's over, we forget about it and do nothing to prevent the next one...This is frankly difficult to understand, and dangerously short-sighted," warned Mr. Tedros.

Next steps: scale up response, counter 'infodemic'

Mr. Tedros outlined key requests of the international community on the way forward:

Use the window of opportunity provided by China's quick action to intensify preparedness, including for the arrival of new cases, treating patients with dignity, and protecting health workers;

Push back against the 'infodemic', as fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is equally as dangerous. He called on governments, companies and news organizations to work with WHO to sound the appropriate level of alarm, without fanning the flames of hysteria; and

A "whole-of-government approach" must be coherent and coordinated, guided by evidence and public health priorities, as tackling the spread of the virus "is not a job for health ministers alone.

"We have a choice. Can we come together to face a common and dangerous enemy? Or will we allow fear, suspicion and irrationality to distract and divide us?" the WHO chief asked.

He said that in our fractured and divided world, health was one of the few areas in which international cooperation offered the opportunity for countries to work together for a common cause.

"This is a time for facts, not fear. This is a time for rationality, not rumours. This is a time for solidarity, not stigma," Mr. Tedros concluded.

14.4 Coronavirus: covid-19 has killed more people than SARS and MERS combined, despite lower case fatality rate

Source: bmj.com,18 February,2020

The novel coronavirus that has so far spread from China to 26 countries around the world does not seem to be as "deadly as other coronaviruses including SARS and MERS," the World Health Organization has said.

At a briefing on 17 February WHO's director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said that more than 80% of patients with covid-19 have a "mild disease and will recover" and that it is fatal in 2% of reported cases. In comparison, the 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) had a case fatality rate of around 10% (8098 cases and 774 deaths), while Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) killed 34% of people with the illness between 2012 and 2019 (2494 cases and 858 deaths).12

However, despite the lower case fatality rate, covid-19 has so far resulted in more deaths (1871) than SARS and MERS combined (1632).

The latest update from China's National Health Commission said that as at 17 February there had been 72 436 confirmed cases of the infection and 1868 deaths in the country. More than 12 500 patients have recovered and been discharged from hospital, while around 58 000 patients with confirmed cases (including 11 741 in a serious condition) and 6242 with suspected cases remain.

Outside China, WHO has reported 794 cases across 26 countries and three deaths.

Referencing a new paper from China that was based on 44 000 confirmed cases, Tedros said that 14% of cases of covid-19 were severe, causing pneumonia and shortness of breath, and that about 5% of patients had critical disease, including respiratory failure, septic shock, and multiorgan failure.

"As more data comes in from China, we're starting to get a clearer picture of the outbreak, how it's developing, and where it could be headed," Tedros said. He added that while the data seemed to show a decline in the rate of new cases, the trend could change as new populations became affected.

This comment came after the first case of covid-19 was confirmed in Africa (in Egypt). Commenting on this milestone in the outbreak, Trudie Lang, director of the Global Health Network at the University of Oxford, said it was "important but not unexpected." She highlighted the fact that WHO had declared the outbreak a "public health emergency" to "support less well resourced nations in responding and preparing for cases."

Lang praised the response of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, which is based in Ethiopia and supports countries with surveillance, emergency responses, and prevention of infectious disease. She said that the patient had been isolated, and all contacts had been found and tested (all negative). However, she added that a "key challenge" would be to ensure that countries across Africa had diagnostic capacity.

WHO is calling for donations to help it help countries prepare. It said that $675m was needed, and that though some contributions had been made, they "have not seen the urgency in funding that we need."

WHO has been providing countries with testing kits, personal protective equipment, and training for health workers, as well as advice on how to do screening, testing, contact tracing, and treatment.

Tedros said, "We have a window of opportunity now. We need resources now to ensure countries are prepared now. We don't know how long this window of opportunity will remain open. Let's not squander it."

14.5 Coronavirus: South Korea Says COVID-19 Cases Doubled In 24 Hours

Source: npr.org,20 February,2020

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in South Korea has doubled in just 24 hours, to 104 from 51, the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. Many of

the new cases of coronavirus are linked to a Christian sect in Daegu, a city in southern South Korea. Korea's CDC says a woman who became the country's 31st confirmed patient on Feb.

18 had attended services held by a religious group called the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, The Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony. The woman, who was born in 1959, had visited Wuhan, China — where the novel coronavirus was first discovered in December — the KCDC says. It adds that she was reported to have 1,160 contacts – by far the most of anyone on its list of patients.

A man adjusts a boy's protective face mask on Thursday as they try to avoid contracting a new coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea. The country is reporting a spike in COVID-19 cases, predominantly in its south.

"The church has shut down" because of the outbreak, NPR's Anthony Kuhn reports from Seoul. "Daegu has closed some public facilities," he adds. "A U.S. Army garrison in Daegu restricted travel in and out of the base and imposed a quarantine on personnel who had visited the church." In a message posted online, the Shincheonji church expressed deep

regret over the coronavirus cases. It also said it's cooperating with authorities and is spending several days sterilizing its buildings in Daegu. The same woman who attended the church also visited Cheongdo Daenam Hospital, which has emerged as a second cluster of infections. Patients and staff there are being tested for the respiratory virus, and the hospital is being disinfected, according to the KCDC.

South Korea is also reporting its first coronavirus-related death — and the patient was from the Cheongdo Daenam Hospital cluster. While the 63-year-old man had tested positive for the virus, the exact cause of death was still being investigated, the KCDC says. More than 75,000 COVID-19 cases have been confirmed worldwide, according to a disease-tracking dashboard created by the Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering.

The virus has killed more than 2,000 people — most of them in China's Hubei province, the center of the outbreak. Globally, nearly 17,000 people had recovered from the illness as of Thursday afternoon ET.

A Chinese man wears a protective mask as he drives a trike in Beijing, China, Thursday. The novel coronavirus has killed more than 2,000 people – most of them in China's Hubei province.

Diamond Princess passengers die after contracting COVID-19

Two Japanese passengers who had been on the quarantined Diamond Princess cruise ship have died after being infected with the novel coronavirus. Japan's health ministry says the male and female passengers were hospitalized last week. They were both in their 80s.

The man and woman are the first Diamond Princess passengers to die during the virus outbreak. The cruise ship has been under a quarantine at Yokohama's port near Tokyo since Feb. 3.

A bus carrying passengers from the Diamond Princess cruise ship is escorted as it leaves the terminal in Yokohama, Japan, on Thursday. Two people who were recently taken off the ship have died after contracting COVID-19.

Both of the passengers died about a week after tests confirmed they were infected with the respiratory virus. The male passenger was from Kanagawa prefecture and the female passenger was from Tokyo, the health ministry said. It added that while the man died from COVID-19, the woman died from pneumonia.

A total of 634 people from the Diamond Princess have tested positive for COVID-19, the Japanese agency said. More than half that number are identified as "asymptomatic pathogen carriers," meaning that while they don't show signs of the illness, they can still transmit the disease to others or become sick themselves.

The deaths were reported as the shipwide 14-day quarantine expires and as the governments of Hong Kong, Australia, Israel, Canada and other countries work to repatriate their citizens. Like the Americans who recently arrived in the U.S., those passengers face new quarantines back home.

When passengers test positive for the novel coronavirus, they're taken off the Diamond Princess and sent to local hospitals. Those diagnoses also reset the 14-day quarantine period for their traveling partners and close contacts.

About 3,700 passengers and crew were aboard the ship when it initially arrived at the Yokohama terminal. That number is now dropping by the hundreds

14.6 Iran shuts schools, cultural centres as coronavirus kills five

Source: gulf-times.com,22 FEbruary,2020

A young Iranian man wearing a protective mask, walks in a busy street in the capital Tehran

Iran on Saturday ordered the closure of schools, universities and cultural centres after a coronavirus outbreak that has killed five people in the Islamic republic -- the most outside the Far East.

The moves came as Iranian authorities reported one more death among 10 new cases of the virus.

Since it emerged in December, the new coronavirus has killed 2,345 people in China, the epicentre of the epidemic, and 17 elsewhere in the world.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Iran first surfaced on Wednesday, when authorities said it claimed the lives of two elderly people in Qom, a Shiite holy city south of the capital.

They were the first confirmed deaths from the disease in the Middle East.

"We have 10 new confirmed cases of COVID-19," Iran's health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told state television on Saturday.

"One of the new cases has unfortunately passed away," he added, noting that eight of them had been hospitalised in Qom and two in Tehran, without specifying where the death occurred.

The latest cases take to 28 the total number of confirmed infections in Iran.

Based on official figures, nearly 18 percent of those infected with the new coronavirus in Iran have died, compared with little more than three percent in China.

As a "preventive measure", authorities ordered the closure of schools, universities and other educational centres in Qom and the nearby city of Arak from Sunday, state television reported.

The government also announced that "all art and cinema events in halls across the country have been cancelled until the end of the week" in order to stop infections.

The World Health Organization has expressed concern over the speed at which COVID-19 has spread in Iran, as well as it being exported from the Islamic republic to other countries including Lebanon.

"The concern is... that we have seen an increase in cases, a very rapid increase in a matter of a few days," said Sylvie Briand, director of the WHO's global infectious hazard preparedness department.

"We are just wondering about also the potential of more exported cases in the coming days," she added.

The Iranian outbreak emerged in the lead-up to a parliamentary election on Friday.

State media said the disease had failed to dampen "the revolutionary zeal of Qom's people" to turn out to vote.

Iranians have been snapping up surgical face masks in a bid to avoid catching the virus.

Online retailer Digikala -- Iran's equivalent of Amazon -- said on Friday that it had sold 75,000 masks within 36 hours.

It said it was not claiming a commission on its mask sales, amid concerns that demand was causing prices to skyrocket on the black market.

"We stand against the unusual price increase," Digikala tweeted.

"We stand alongside our dear suppliers and by providing fresh supplies, we hope we can meet a part of the country's demand."

The health ministry said tests had been carried out on 785 suspected coronavirus cases since the outbreak began.

"Most of the cases are either Qom residents or have a history of coming and going from Qom to other cities," its spokesman said.

Iran has yet to confirm the origin of the outbreak, but one official speculated that it was brought in by Chinese workers.

"The coronavirus epidemic has started in the country," state news agency IRNA quoted the health ministry's Minoo Mohraz as saying.

"Since those infected in Qom had no contact with the Chinese ... the source is probably Chinese workers who work in Qom and have travelled to China," she added.

But the official did not provide any evidence to support her claim, and it has not been reported elsewhere in Iranian media.

All of those who lost their lives are believed to be Iranian citizens.

Qom is a centre for Islamic studies and pilgrims, attracting scholars from Iran and beyond.

Following the announcement of the first two deaths, neighbouring Iraq on Thursday clamped down on travel to and from the Islamic republic.

The Iraqi health ministry announced that people in Iran were barred from entering the country "until further notice".

Kuwait's national carrier Kuwait Airways meanwhile announced it would suspend all flights to Iran.

14.7 Hong Kong to bar non-resident arrivals from South Korea over coronavirus, to issue 'red travel alert'

Source: newindianexpress.com, 24 February, 2020

The 'red travel alert' means anyone who has been in South Korea in the last fortnight will be denied entry to the international finance hub.

People wearing masks, walk across a street in Hong Kong, Monday, Feb. 24, 2020. The COVID-19 viral illness has sickened thousands of people throughout China and other countries since December.

HONG KONG: Hong Kong will close its doors on Tuesday to all arrivals from South Korea except returning city residents in response to the growing coronavirus outbreak, the territory's security chief said.

"Considering the development of the epidemic in South Korea, the Security Bureau will issue a red travel alert," John Lee told reporters Monday.

The notice means anyone who has been in South Korea in the last fortnight will be denied entry to the international finance hub.

Hong Kong residents will be allowed to return, but will have to undergo a fortnight of medical surveillance.

South Korea has so far confirmed more than 800 cases of the novel coronavirus, by far the largest national total outside China, the origin of the disease.

Hong Kong has 79 confirmed cases, two of whom have died.

The city has implemented compulsory quarantine for any arrivals from mainland China, where the epidemic is most heavily concentrated.

The South Korea ban is the first time it has placed restrictions on a country beyond China.

On Monday, Hong Kong's government also said it would charter flights to evacuate residents from Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the epidemic began in late December.

Hundreds of Hong Kongers are still trapped in the city and have been begging for rescue.

Officials said they would prioritise the most vulnerable, such as pregnant women and people needing urgent medical attention.

Last week, Hong Kong evacuated some 200 residents from the Diamond Princess cruise ship off the coast of Japan which had a major outbreak of the virus.

Two of the returnees have since tested positive for the virus.

14.8 COVID-19: More new virus cases outside China than in, 'no time for complacency', says UN health agency

Source: news.un.org,26 February,2020

"The sudden increases of cases in Italy, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Korea are deeply concerning", WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a briefing in Geneva on Wednesday. He stated that there are now cases linked to Iran in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait and Oman and to Italy in Algeria, Austria, Croatia, Germany, Spain and Switzerland.

"Yesterday, a joint team between WHO and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control arrived in Rome to review the public health measures that have been put in place and provide technical support", he informed, saying that over the weekend a WHO team will travel to Iran to provide support.

One of the biggest challenges the UN health agency faces is that too many affected countries are still not sharing data with WHO.

"WHO cannot provide appropriate public health guidance without disaggregated data and detailed line lists", said Mr. Ghebreyesus. "We're communicating with ministers directly, there is some improvement, and we urge all countries to share this data with WHO immediately".

Not a pandemic

The increase in cases outside China has prompted some media and politicians to push for a pandemic to be declared.

A messenger leaves packages at an outdoor drop-off location as he is not allowed to enter buildings during the coronavirus outbreak in China

"We should not be too eager to declare a pandemic without a careful and clear-minded analysis of the facts", he maintained, reminding that WHO has already declared it highest level of alarm: a public health emergency of international concern.

"Using the word pandemic carelessly has no tangible benefit, but it does have significant risk in terms of amplifying unnecessary and unjustified fear and stigma, and paralyzing systems", he explained. "It may also signal that we can no longer contain the virus, which is not true".

The head of WHO maintained that the fight can be won "if we do the right things".

While affirming that "we will not hesitate to use the word pandemic if it is an accurate description of the situation", Mr. Ghebreyesus said that WHO is monitoring the epidemic around the clock and engaging internal and experts on this issue and has witnessed "no

sustained and intensive community transmission" of this virus, nor "large-scale severe disease or death".

Prepare for the worst

China has fewer than 80,000 cases in a population of 1.4 billion people. In the rest of the world, there are 2,790 cases, in a population of 6.3 billion.

"Do not mistake me", he said, "I am not downplaying the seriousness of the situation, or the potential for this to become a pandemic…every scenario is still on the table".

The WHO chief spelled out: "The primary objective of all countries with cases must be to contain the virus", and "all countries, whether they have cases or not, must prepare for a potential pandemic".

Every country needs to be ready to detect cases early, to isolate patients, trace contacts, provide quality clinical care, prevent hospital outbreaks, and prevent community transmission. And WHO is providing tools to prepare, accordingly.

"This is no time for complacency", he underscored. "This is a time for continued vigilance".

WHO-China joint mission

As of Wednesday morning, China had reported 78,190 cases to WHO, including 2,718 deaths and reported only 10 new cases outside of Hubei province.

The results of a WHO-China joint mission to assess the rapidly evolving epidemic revealed a range of findings about the transmissibility of the virus, the severity of disease and the impact of the measures taken.

Having traveled to several different provinces, including Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak, the team found that the epidemic peaked and plateaued between the 23 January and 2 February, and has been declining steadily since then.

"They have found that there has been no significant change in the genetic makeup of the virus", said Mr. Ghebreyesus. "The team also estimate that the measures taken in China have averted a significant number of cases".

While the report contains a wealth of other information and includes 22 recommendations, the WHO chief said, "the key message that should give all countries hope, courage and confidence is that this virus can be contained".

Socio-economic damages

"We are not just fighting to contain a virus and save lives", underscored Mr. Ghebreyesus. "We are also in a fight to contain the social and economic damage a global pandemic could do".

He said that WHO is working with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to estimate the potential economic impact of the epidemic and develop a strategy and policy options for mitigation.

In closing he affirmed, "this is a time for global solidarity – political solidarity, technical solidarity and financial solidarity. That is the only way to prevent infections and save lives".

Responsibility and coordination

Meanwhile, WHO and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) issued a joint statement solidifying their commitment to work together in guiding the travel and tourism sectors' response to COVID-19.
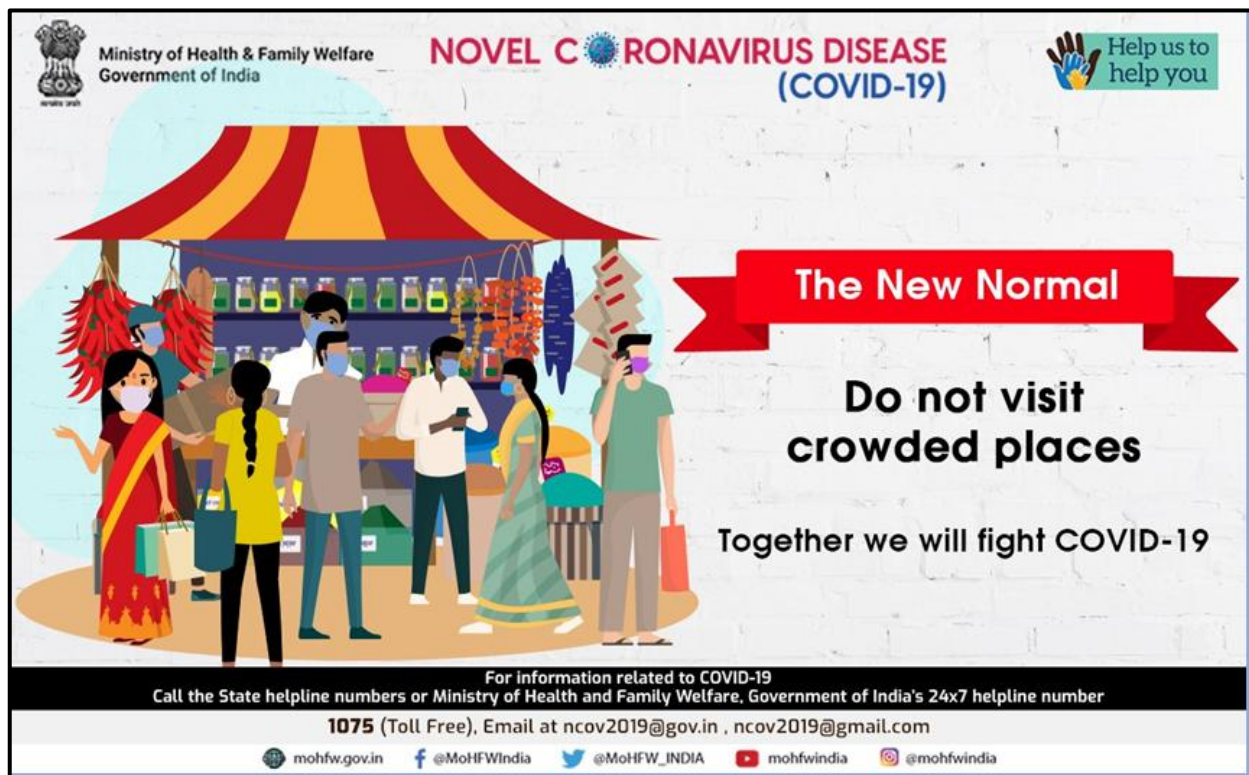
Stressing that "cooperation is key", the UN agencies are working in close consultation and with other partners to assist States in ensuring that health measures be implemented in ways that minimize unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.

"Tourism's response needs to be measured and consistent, proportionate to the public health threat and based on local risk assessment…in line with WHO's overall guidance and recommendations", read the statement.

Both stand ready to work with those communities and countries affected by the current health emergency.

"Travel restrictions going beyond these may cause unnecessary interference with international traffic, including negative repercussions on the tourism sector", concluded the statement.

MARCH 2020

15.1 COVID-19: NASA maps show decline in pollution amid slowdown

Source: downtoearth.org.in,2 March,2020

Pollution levels in China declined dramatically between January and February 2020, according to latest maps released by United State's National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

According to the space agency, the decline was partially because of economic slowdown in the east Asian country following a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The NASA monitoring satellites in the maps showed a significant decrease in nitrogen dioxide (NO2) levels between January 1-20, 2020 (before the quarantine) and February 10-25, 2020 (after the quarantine).

Nitrogen dioxide is a noxious gas emitted from motor vehicles, power plants, industrial facilities, etc.

Scientists said reduction in NO2 pollution was first seen near Wuhan, but eventually spread across the country, according to NASA's Earth Observatory.
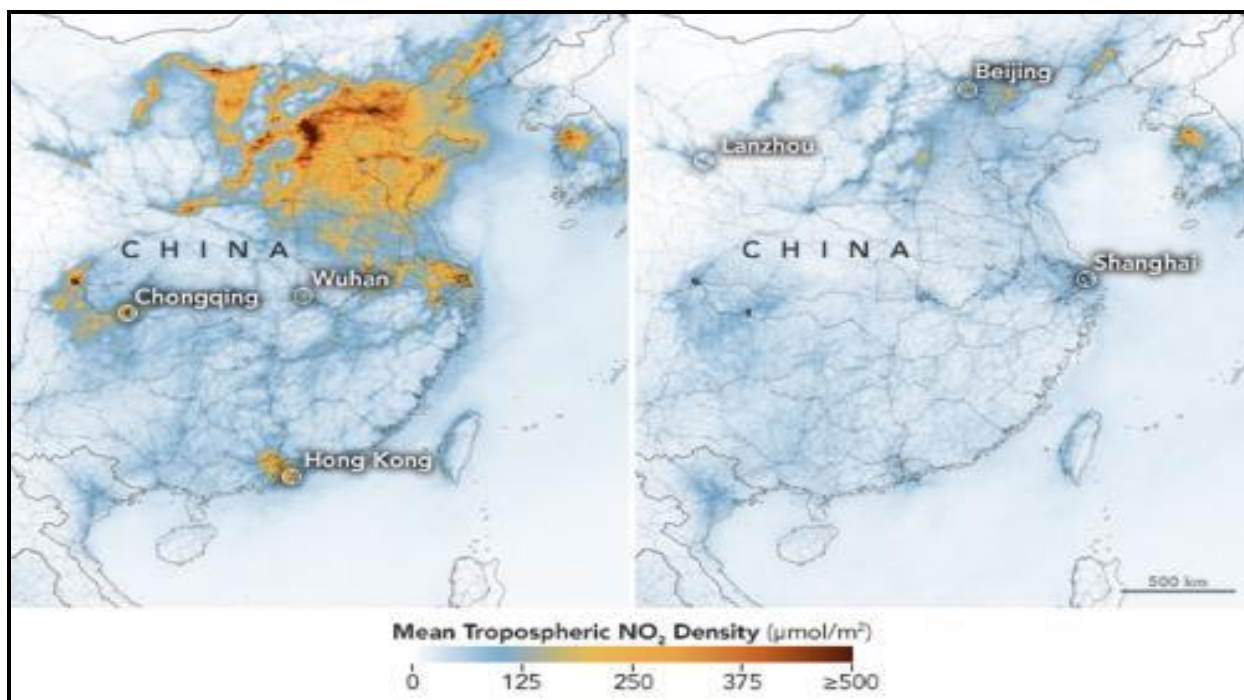
NO2 levels decreased between January 1-20, 2020 and February 10-25, 2020. Source: NASA Earth Observatory

Globally, 87,137 cases of the virus have been reported. By 29 February, 2020, China alone reported 79,968 cases and 2,873 deaths.

In India, one positive case of COVID-19 has been detected in New Delhi, and one has been detected in Telangana. Earlier, three cases of COVID-19 were reported from Kerala. No deaths have been reported from India so far.

The maps below showed NO2 values over three periods in 2020 — January 1-20 (before Lunar New Year), January 28-February 9 (around New Year celebrations), and February 10-25 (after the celebrations).

The 2020 values were compared to the same periods in 2019. Unlike in 2019, levels in 2020 did not rise after Chinese New Year, the maps showed.

A report by climate watch website Carbon Brief had earlier reported that COVID-19 may have shaved off more than 100 tonnes of CO2 in early February 2020.

According to the report, measures taken to control the epidemic resulted in reductions of 15-40 per cent in output across key industrial sectors.
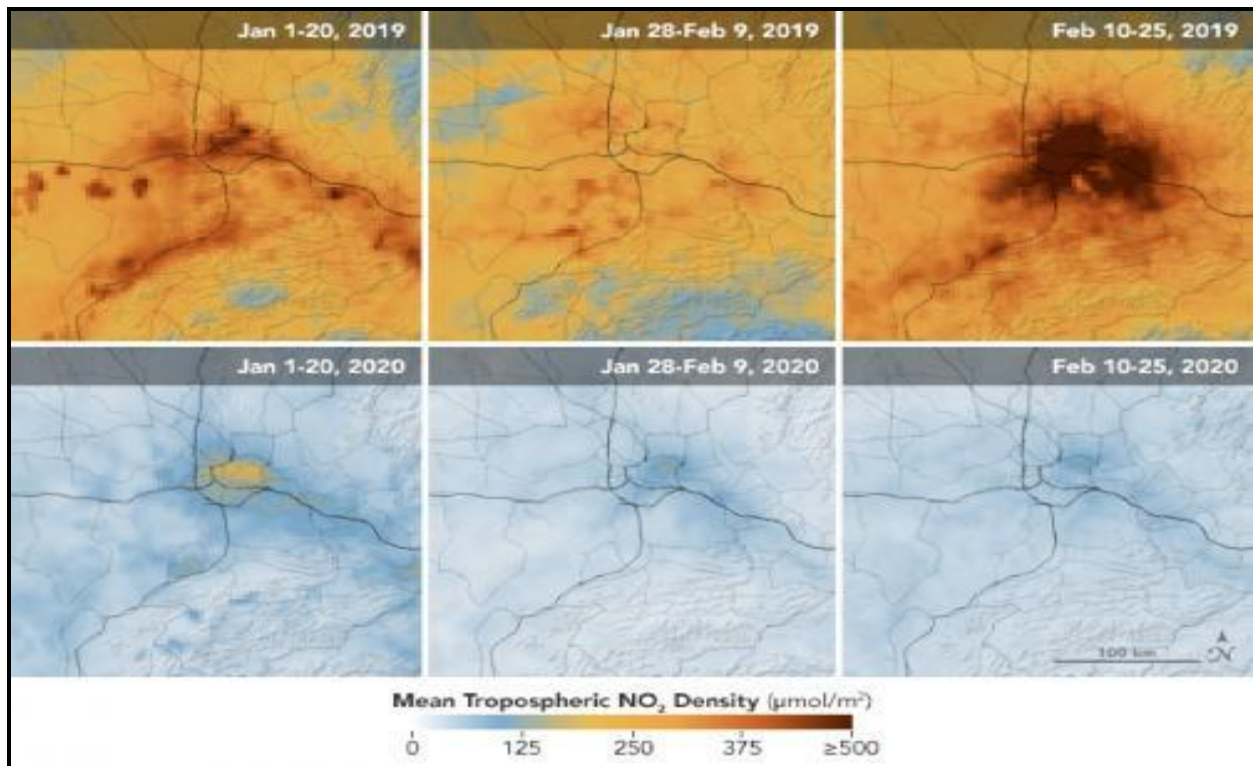
Unlike in 2019, levels in 2020 did not rise after Chinese New Year. Source: NASA Earth Observatory

According to scientists, the drop in NO2 in 2020 also coincided with Lunar New Year celebrations in China. According to past studies, air pollution decreased between last week of January and early February as businesses and factories remained closed during this time.

According to Fei Liu, air quality researcher at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, "This is the first time I have seen such a dramatic drop-off over such a wide area for a specific event."

15.2 Italy announces lockdown as global coronavirus cases surpass 105,000

Source: edition.cnn.com,8 March,2020

(CNN)Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte signed a decree early Sunday that will put millions of people across northern Italy under lockdown due to the novel coronavirus.

The sweeping move puts the entire Lombardy region, as well as 14 other provinces, under travel restrictions, and is one of the toughest responses implemented outside of mainland China to get the Covid-19 epidemic under control.

CNN is verifying exactly when the lockdown will go into effect.

The announcement came after Italy saw a dramatic spike of 1,247 confirmed novel coronavirus cases on Saturday, the Civil Protection Department said in a statement.

The country has now recorded 5,883 cases and 233 deaths, the most fatalities outside mainland China and the biggest outbreak in Europe.

Announcing the new measures, Conte said: "There will be an obligation to avoid any movement of people who are either entering or leaving" the affected areas.

 "Even within the areas moving around will occur only for essential work or health reasons," he said, according to Reuters.

While the lockdown only applies to northern Italy, other measures will be applied to the entire country.

These include the suspension of schools, university classes, theaters and cinemas, as well as bars, nightclubs, and sports events. Religious ceremonies, including funerals, will also be suspended.

Other countries in Europe are also struggling to contain outbreaks as cases continue to rise.

On Saturday, France's general director of health, Jerome Salomon, confirmed 16 dead and 949 infected nationwide, and Germany now has 795 cases.

The United Kingdom confirmed a second death from the novel coronavirus on Saturday, while 206 people have tested positive, British health officials said in a statement.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has called on "all countries to continue efforts that have been effective in limiting the number of cases and slowing the spread of the virus."

In a statement, the WHO said: "Allowing uncontrolled spread should not be a choice of any government, as it will harm not only the citizens of that country but affect other countries as well."

15.3 Coronavirus Has Become a Pandemic, W.H.O. Says

Source: nytimes.com,11 March,2020

But the virus can still be stopped if nations are willing to take aggressive measures, said the organization's director-general.

The spread of the coronavirus is now a pandemic, officials at the World Health Organization said on Wednesday. "We have rung the alarm bell loud and clear," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the W.H.O.'s director-general.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the World Health Organization's director-general, on Wednesday. He called for countries to help protect one another against a common threat

Dr. Tedros called for countries to learn from one another's successes, act in unison and help protect one another against a common threat.

"Find, isolate, test and treat every case, and trace every contact," Dr. Tedros said. "Ready your hospitals. Protect and train your health care workers."

"Let's all look out for each other, because we're in this together to do the right things with calm and to protect the citizens of the world."

Although this is the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus, "we also believe that this is the first pandemic that is able to be controlled," Dr. Tedros added.

He pointed several times to the success of China, which has cut new infections from over 3,500 a day in late January to a mere 24 in the most recent daily count. The world is watching to see whether China can keep its numbers down as it gradually releases millions of city dwellers from quarantine and lets them go back to work.

South Korea and Singapore have also begun to see cases drop. But the rest of the world is seeing alarmingly rapid rises.

The W.H.O. is emphatically not suggesting that the world should give up on containment, Dr. Tedros said.

"We are suggesting a blended strategy," he said, referring to a blend of containment and mitigation. "We should double down. We should be more aggressive."

China, South Korea and Singapore have shown that aggressive contact tracing and rapid isolation of the sick can work. Unlike Western nations, all three rejected the idea of home quarantine, because cases rapidly spread in families.

Some alarmed public health experts have described Beijing's approach as draconian or brutal, but the W.H.O. has referred to it simply as aggressive.

Wuhan and surrounding cities, the outbreak's epicenter, have been shut down since late January, and travel elsewhere is strictly limited.

Everyone must wear a mask outdoors and submit to constant temperature checks, which are administered at the doors to every office building, store and restaurant, as well as bus, train and subway stations — even at the entries to apartment houses and residential neighborhoods.

The use of sanitizer or hand-washing on entry is mandatory.

People who think they are infected are screened at special "fever clinics," not at doctors' offices. They get temperature checks, flu tests, white blood cell counts, CT lung scans and laboratory tests for the virus, according to Dr. Bruce Aylward, leader of the W.H.O. observer mission that visited China in February.

Anyone who appears to have the new virus, instead of flu or bacterial pneumonia, is held until the lab results are in or while testing is repeated. Some are held at repurposed hotels.

If they are found to be infected, they may not return home — almost 80 percent of infections were within families, studies in China found.

If infected persons are seriously ill or elderly, they are hospitalized. Those with milder cases recuperate in isolation centers with hundreds of beds and nursing care. The centers are segregated by sex and age; even children who are infected must go.

No visitors are allowed, but there activities like dance classes to fight the boredom and keep people active.

As difficult and aggressive as they are, such measures "reduce the number of cases that are wheeled through the doors of hospitals," said Dr. Michael Ryan, head of the agency's emergencies program.

The largest number of deaths in China occurred in Wuhan, because its hospitals were overwhelmed in early January, when the authorities were suppressing news of the danger.

The fact that 90 percent of the world's cases are in four countries — China, Italy, Iran and South Korea — indicates that the pandemic can still be contained if countries act fast, Dr. Tedros said.

There are only about 1,100 confirmed cases in the United States, but experts fear that is only a fraction of the real prevalence, because testing for the coronavirus has been unavailable or haphazard in the United States.

The number of cases in the world doubles every six days, epidemiologists have estimated.

The epidemic is thought to have begun with a single infection of a person in Wuhan, presumably by a butchered animal, in mid-November last year. Without any containment measures, it would now be at about one million cases; by the end of April, there would have been over 250 million.

Exactly how many cases were prevented by China's crackdown is unknown, said Dr. Aylward, "but it's in the hundreds of thousands."

The goal of an aggressive containment response, W.H.O. officials explained, is to hold down the number of deaths and critical illnesses until a vaccine can be rolled out, possibly by early next year.

Although declaring a pandemic is largely symbolic, given that the virus has been spreading around the world for weeks, health officials hope the action will raise public awareness of the approaching danger.

Many countries have been slow to prepare, and the W.H.O.'s appeals for funds to help the poorest countries get ready have largely gone unanswered as the world's wealthiest countries struggle to protect themselves.

Declaring a pandemic does not change what the W.H.O. will do, Dr. Ryan said. It is an effort "to galvanize the world to fight."

A lot of thought was given to finally using the word, he said, because of the fear that it would cause countries to give up the fight as hopeless.

As of Wednesday, the virus had infected more than 120,000 people in 114 countries, killing about 4,300 of them.

For many days, when pressed on whether the disease is a pandemic, W.H.O. officials have drawn a distinction between "uncontrolled spread" and "uncontrollable spread." They argued that China's thus far successful effort to drive new cases down proved that the global outbreak could be controlled in places even without a vaccine.

Although Dr. Tedros said some countries were not moving fast enough or taking the threat seriously enough, Dr. Ryan declined to name them.

"The W.H.O. does not criticize its member states in public," he said. "You know who you are."

Declaring a pandemic has no legal meaning and does not impose any new measures.

On Jan. 30, the W.H.O. declared the virus a public health emergency and said that distinction was more important than whether to call it a pandemic.

Agency officials have often declared themselves frustrated by pressure — which often comes from journalists — to say exactly when a pandemic is officially underway.

After the 2009 pandemic of H1N1 swine flu from Mexico to the Americas to Europe and beyond, the W.H.O. gave up its old definition of a pandemic: "sustained human-to-human transmission of a novel pathogen in two or more W.H.O. regions."

Journalists quibbled with a W.H.O. media representative over the judgment that the spread in both North America and South America did not qualify as pandemic. (They comprise a single W.H.O. region.) And reporters wondered how many cases in Britain constituted "sustained transmission."

In February, W.H.O. media representatives said they had given up declaring pandemics so as not to reopen a never-ending discussion.

But the usefulness of the term for raising alarm apparently proved irresistible.

The W.H.O. has sought $675 million for the fight against the coronavirus. It has received only $100 million in pledges and $51 million in cash, according to its website.

Dr. Ryan urged countries to hire thousands more contact-tracers, who find everyone known to have come in contact with an infected person and isolate anyone who may be infected. At the height of its outbreak, the city of Wuhan, China, where the pandemic began, had 18,000 contact-tracers working in teams of five.

Many were government employees who had been reassigned from various government departments and retrained on the job, according to Dr. Bruce Aylward, a W.H.O. assistant director-general who led the agency's mission to China in February.

15.4 Coronavirus lockdown and emergency averted 7 lakh cases in China: Study

Source: hindustantimes.com,14 March,2020

China reported 11 new infections of the coronavirus, , including 4 in Wuhan, on March 14, and for the first time since the start of the epidemic the majority of them were imported cases from overseas

The study named, 'The Impact of Transmission Control Measures in the first 50 Days of the Epidemic,' was compiled by more than 20 scientists from institutes in China, the US and the UK.

China prevented nearly 700,000 covid-19 infections because of the unprecedented lockdown of the epidemic epicentre Wuhan city and the central Chinese province of Hubei, a new international study estimates.

The lockdown measures in Wuhan were aided by national emergency measures like the shutting down of intra-city public transport, the closing of entertainment venues and the banning of public gatherings, it said.

Hundreds of thousands of covid-19 cases were avoided because of the measures despite 4.3 million travelling out of Wuhan between January 11 and January 23, the day the lockdown was announced, possibly ushering in the largest quarantine measure in history.
The study named, "The Impact of Transmission Control Measures in the first 50 Days of the Epidemic," was compiled by more than 20 scientists from institutes in China, the US and the UK. It analysed past and current travel data and information related to the infection numbers to come to the conclusion.

"As there is currently neither a vaccine nor a specific drug treatment for covid-19, a range of public health (non-pharmaceutical) interventions have been used to control the outbreak. In an attempt to prevent further dispersal of covid-19 from its source, all transport was prohibited in and out of Wuhan city from 10:00 am on 23 January 2020, followed by the whole of Hubei Province a day later," the study said.

The study says that in terms of the population covered this appeared to be the largest attempted quarantine (movement restriction) event in human history and analyses the efficacies of the preventive measures.

"Among interventions investigated here, the most effective were suspending intra-city public transport, closing entertainment venues and banning public gatherings," it said.

It states that the national emergency response delayed the growth and limited the size of the covid-19 epidemic and, by 19 February (day 50), had averted hundreds of thousands of cases across China. The researchers carried out a quantitative analysis of the impact of travel restrictions and transmission control measures during the first 50 days of the covid-19 epidemic in China from December 31 to February 19. This period coincided with the 40 days of the Chinese New Year (CNY) festival holidays -- 15 days before the CNY on January 25 and 25 days afterward.

During the CNY holiday travel in 2017 and 2018, on an average of 5.2 million people from Wuhan city travelled out during the 15 days before the CNY.

"In 2020, this travel was interrupted by the Wuhan city shut down, but 4.3 million people travelled out of the city between January 11 and the implementation of the ban on January

23," the study notes. In 2017 and 2018, travel out of the city during the 25 days after the Chinese Lunar New Year (or CNY) averaged 6.7 million people each year.

"In 2020, the travel ban prevented almost all of that movement," the researchers said. The researchers added that without the Wuhan travel ban or the national emergency response, there could have been 744,000 (± 156,000) confirmed covid-19 cases outside Wuhan by 19 February, day 50 of the epidemic. In summary, this early analysis suggests that transmission control (non-pharmaceutical) measures initiated during Chinese Spring Festival (or CNY) holiday, including the unprecedented Wuhan city travel ban and the Level 1 national emergency response delayed the growth and limited the size of the 177 COVID-19 epidemic in China, the study said. Interestingly the study suggests that urbanization and modernization of transport could have actually helped in spreading coronavirus.

"Urbanisation and the development of rapid transport systems in China probably accelerated the spread and magnified the challenge of controlling covid-19, as indicated by the comparatively slow dispersal of pandemic influenza H1N1 in 2009," the study said.

"In addition, the covid-19 epidemic began just before the period of intense travel during the Spring Festival (or CNY) holiday. Nevertheless, the Wuhan city travel ban provided extra time to implement transmission control measures in other parts of China and, once established, these were an additional powerful force in curtailing and reversing the epidemic," it said. The yet to be peer-reviewed study was published by medRxiv, founded by the US-based Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (CSHL), a non-profit research and educational institution, Yale University, and BMJ, a global medical knowledge provider.

15.5 Coronavirus by the numbers in Massachusetts, U.S. and the world

Source: bostonherald.com,18 March,2020

More than 200,000 cases around the world The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Massachusetts topped 250 on Wednesday as the total around the U.S. approached 8,000 — and the world figure eclipsed 200,000.

Thirty-eight new coronavirus cases were confirmed in Massachusetts from the previous day, bringing the Bay State's total to 256 confirmed cases, according to a state Department of Public Health update on Wednesday. In comparison, the number of confirmed cases 10 days ago in Massachusetts was 28.

Covid-19 cases

The total number of confirmed cases in Massachusetts, according to daily reports from the state Department of Public Health.

Statewide total: 256

Worldwide total: 214,900

MARCH 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

Coronavirus by the numbers in Massachusetts, U.S. and the world
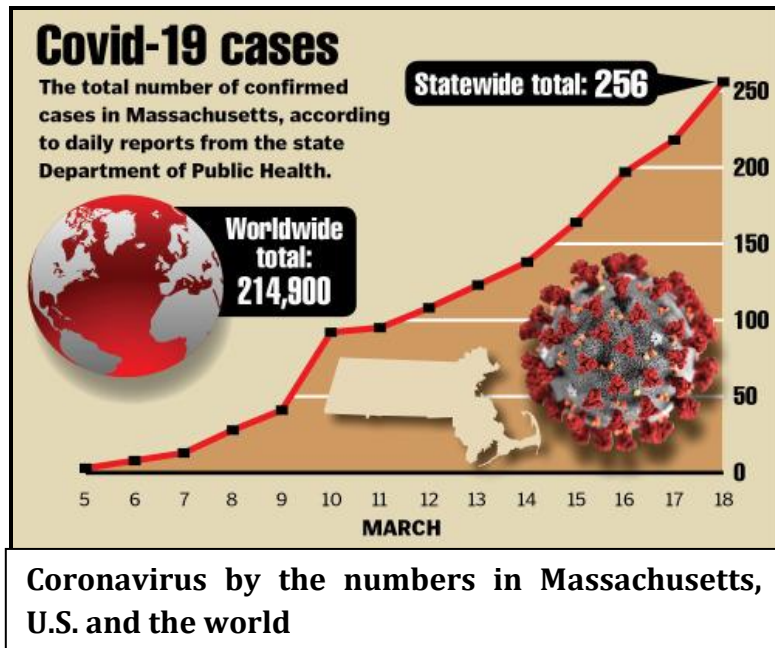
Of the 256 confirmed cases in the Bay State, 97 cases are tied to the Biogen employee conference in Boston's downtown waterfront in late February.

Of the remaining cases, 38 are tied to local transmission, 26 are travel-related, and 95 are under investigation.

Middlesex County has the most confirmed cases with 100. Suffolk County has 51 confirmed cases, and Norfolk County has 45 confirmed cases.

Among the Massachusetts cases is a House of Representatives' staff member, Speaker Robert DeLeo confirmed on Wednesday.

There are now cases in all 50 states, with the total at 7,769 cases. The most confirmed cases are in New York with 2,382 cases; Washington state with 1,012 cases; California with 611 cases; New Jersey with 427 cases; and Florida with 314 cases.

Those states also have the most coronavirus deaths — 55 deaths in Washington state; 16 deaths in New York; 13 deaths in California; seven deaths in Florida; and five deaths in New Jersey. A total of 118 people have died in the U.S. from coronavirus.

Worldwide, there are now 214,900 confirmed cases and 8,700 deaths. The most cases and deaths are in China, Italy, Iran and Spain.

15.6 What is Covid-19?

Source: theguardian.com,25 March,2020

The new coronavirus has affected more than 425,000 people across the globe, causing more than 18,000 fatalities. The new coronavirus, now known as Covid-19, was first encountered in November 2019, and has gone on to affect over 425,000 people in over 150 countries around the globe, causing more than 18,000 deaths.
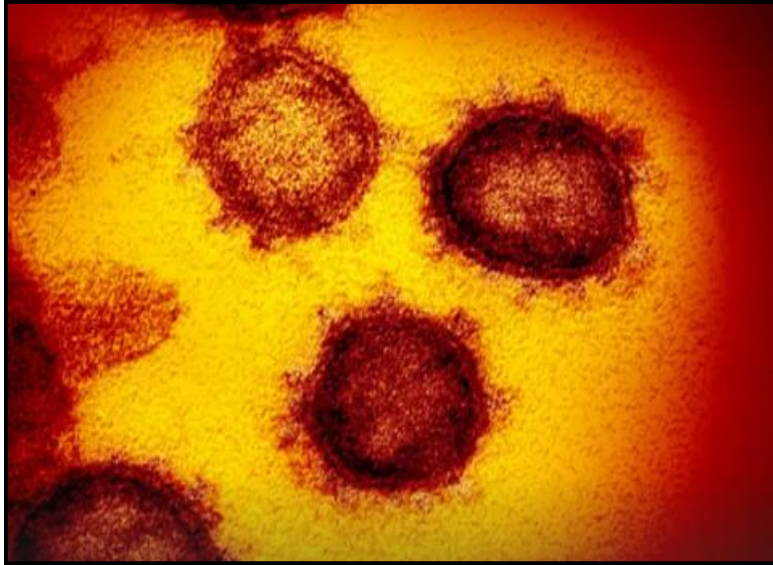
The virus can cause pneumonia-like symptoms. Those who have fallen ill are reported to suffer coughs, fever and breathing difficulties. In severe cases there can be organ failure. As this is viral pneumonia, antibiotics are of no use. The antiviral drugs we have against flu will not work. If people are admitted to hospital, they may get support for their lungs and other organs, as well as fluids. Recovery will depend on the strength of their immune system. Many of those who have died were vulnerable because of existing underlying health conditions.

The name Covid-19 was announced on 11 February by the World Health Organization. The director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said: "We had to find a name that did not refer to a geographical location, an animal, an individual or group of people, and which is also pronounceable and related to the disease. Having a name matters to prevent the use of other names that can be inaccurate or stigmatising."

We don't yet know how dangerous Covid-19 is, and we won't know until more data comes in. The mortality rate seems to be around 2%. For comparison, seasonal flu typically has a mortality rate below 1% and is thought to cause about 400,000 deaths each year globally. Sars had a death rate of more than 10%.

Another key unknown, of which scientists should get a clearer idea in the coming months, is how contagious Covid-19 is. A crucial difference is that unlike flu, there is no vaccine for the new coronavirus, which means it is more difficult for vulnerable members of the population – elderly people or those with existing respiratory or immune problems – to protect themselves. Hand-washing and avoiding other people if you feel unwell are important. One sensible step is to get the flu vaccine, which will reduce the burden on health services if the outbreak turns into a wider epidemic.

Like other coronaviruses, it originated in animals and then migrated to humans. In this case it appears to have originated in the city of Wuhan in China.

Many of those initially infected either worked or frequently shopped in the Huanan seafood wholesale market in the centre of the city, which also sold live and newly slaughtered

animals. China's national health commission confirmed human-to-human transmission of the virus in January.

New and troubling viruses usually originate in animal hosts. Ebola and flu are other examples, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) and Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (Mers) are both caused by coronaviruses that came from animals.

In 2002, Sars spread virtually unchecked to 37 countries, causing global panic, infecting more than 8,000 people and killing more than 750. Mers appears to be less easily passed from human to human, but has greater lethality, killing 35% of about 2,500 people who have been infected.

15.7 COVID-19: China reports zero increase in domestically-transmitted coronavirus cases

Source: newindianexpress.com,26 March,2020

The National Health Commission received reports of 67 new confirmed COVID-19 cases on the Chinese mainland on Wednesday, all of which were imported.

In this March 23, 2020 photo released by Xinhua News Agency, workers disinfect a subway train in preparation for the restoration of public transport in Wuhan, in central China's Hubei province

BEIJING: The Chinese health authority on Thursday said that no new domestically transmitted cases of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) were reported on the Chinese mainland on Wednesday. The National Health Commission received reports of 67 new confirmed COVID-19 cases on the Chinese mainland on Wednesday, all of which were imported.

Of them, 18 were reported in Shanghai, 12 in Inner Mongolia, and 11 in Guangdong. Beijing and Fujian both reported six cases, Shaanxi reported three cases, Tianjin, Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Yunnan each reported two cases, and Shanxi, Jilin and Henan reported one respectively. By the end of Wednesday, 541 imported cases had been reported, said the commission, Xinhua reported.

Also on Wednesday, six deaths and 58 new suspected cases were reported on the mainland with all the deaths in Hubei Province and all the suspected cases from abroad.

On Wednesday, 401 people were discharged from the hospital after recovery, while the number of severe cases decreased by 164 to 1,235.

The overall confirmed cases on the mainland had reached 81,285 by the end of Wednesday, including 3,947 patients who were still being treated, 74,051 patients who had been discharged after recovery, and 3,287 people who died of the disease.

The commission said that 159 people were still suspected of being infected with the virus.

The commission added that 14,714 close contacts were still under medical observation. On Wednesday, 721 people were discharged from medical observation.

By the end of Wednesday, 410 confirmed cases including four deaths had been reported in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), 30 confirmed cases in the Macao SAR, and 235 in Taiwan including two deaths.

A total of 106 patients in Hong Kong, 10 in Macao and 29 in Taiwan had been discharged from the hospital after recovery.

15.8 No lockdown here: Sweden defends its more relaxed coronavirus strategy

Source: cnbc.com,30 March,2020

While the rest of Europe imposes severe restrictions on public life and closes borders and businesses, Sweden is taking a more relaxed approach to the coronavirus outbreak.

Unlike its immediate neighbors Denmark, Finland and Norway Sweden has not closed its borders or its schools. Neither has it closed non-essential businesses or banned gatherings of more than two people, like the U.K. and Germany.

Sweden's response to the outbreak is being overseen largely by the country's Public Health Agency. It has taken a conspicuously different approach to the coronavirus from its international peers, trusting the public to adopt voluntary, softer measures to delay the spread of the virus.

This apparently laissez-faire approach has attracted criticism both from within Sweden, from a group of epidemiologists, as well from other countries which are locking down public life to curb the outbreak.

People dine in a restaurant on March 27, 2020 in Stockholm during the the new coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.

The Public Health Agency's lead epidemiologist, and a key figure in Sweden's national response to the coronavirus, is Anders Tegnell. He told CNBC that although his country's strategy to tackle the virus was different, the aim was the same.

"My view is that basically all European countries are trying to do the same thing — we're trying to slow down the spread as much as possible to keep healthcare and society working ... and we have shown some different methods to slow down the spread," he told CNBC Monday.

"Sweden has gone mostly for voluntary measures because that's how we're used to working," Tegnell added. "And we have a long tradition that it works rather well."

He said the agency had explained to the population why social distancing was needed, "and so far, it's been working reasonably well."

Sweden has 3,700 confirmed cases of coronavirus and has recorded 110 deaths, the latest data from the Public Health Agency shows.

In contrast, Italy, the epicenter of Europe's outbreak, has almost 100,000 cases and over 10,000 deaths, the latest data showed Sunday.

People visit the cherry blossoms trees at Kungstradgarden in Stockholm on March 28, 2020, during the the new coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic

Meanwhile Spain, the second worst-hit country in Europe, has close to 80,000 confirmed cases and 6,500 deaths.

The U.K., considered to be around two weeks behind Italy in terms of the outbreak, has recorded almost 20,000 cases and 1,228 deaths from the virus.

"The incline (in infection and death rates) in Sweden is less steep than in many countries and that's exactly what we're trying to achieve," Tegnell said, adding that opinion polls showed the Swedish public were overall in favor of the agency's approach.

Tegnell didn't rule out more stringent measures in Sweden, however, telling CNBC that if there was a sharp increase in cases, the government and Public Health Agency would have a "big discussion on what other measures we can take."

This weekend, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven said that isolating Stockholm could happen if the outbreak worsens, but that such measures are not currently being discussed.

He had previously insisted that successfully combating the spread of the virus was largely dependent on individual behavior.

People walk at Strandvagen in Stockholm on March 28, 2020, during the the new coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. - Sweden, which has stayed open for business with a softer approach to curbing the COVID-19 spread than most of Europe, on March 27, 2020 limited gatherings to 50 people, down from 500

Life carries on

Sweden has not completely diverged from the rest of Europe. In a similar way to its neighbors, Sweden's government has advocated working from home if at all possible, avoiding non-essential travel and the elderly are advised to avoid social contact. Of course, advice to wash hands regularly has also been promoted.

Restaurants, bars, cafés and nightclubs have been told to offer seated table service only. And as of Sunday, gatherings of more than 50 people are banned (the country had initially

suspended gatherings of more than 500 people). It has also closed universities and colleges, but schools with students under 16 years old remain open.

As such, compared to elsewhere in Europe, life in Sweden feels eerily normal, Stockholm residents say.

"Being both an expat and an educator at a secondary school in Stockholm, I feel conflicted," Erik, a teacher at school in Stockholm, told CNBC Sunday.

"I still need to go into work, on a crowded bus, to teach my students who are advised to keep coming into school. We are all set up for distant learning, but secondary schools are not closing any time soon," he said.

He added that some colleagues were brushing off concerns about coronavirus saying, "It's just the flu, I'm more worried about the start of the pollen season," and he also referred to the "great trust" Swedes have in their public institutions.

Tom, an Englishman who works in construction in Stockholm, said he was impressed that the country remained so calm.

"Besides the obvious social media influences, I think if they would have enforced harsher initiatives like other countries there would have been more panic," he said.

"People have been good in accommodating small changes in their lives to help stop the spread, and have been very helpful to each other ... To be honest, Sweden has behaved exactly as I would have expected the Swedes to behave."

Stockholm residents acknowledged that there has been a decline in activity in the city, and yet social life continues.

"On Friday evening, when I went on my way home, I saw loads of groups of both young and middle-aged people hanging out on one of the central squares in Stockholm. It amazed me," Erik said.

"Whether the Swedish strategy is based on science, reluctance to limit people's freedom, or on trust that citizens will do what is needed, is not clear to me, at all."

Tide turning?

Restrictions or not, Sweden's economy won't escape unscathed from the crisis. Last week, Swedbank forecast that the economy would contract 4% in 2020.

"The downturn in the Swedish economy is broader and faster than during the financial crisis. Unemployment will reach 10% already by summer, despite unprecedented fiscal stimulus," Swedbank said in its report released last Wednesday.

"Most sectors in the Swedish economy are bleeding. In the services sector, several companies are completely without demand, abandoned as cautious households have gone home. Manufacturing is struggling with broken supply chains and falling demand."

The Swedish government has said that its aim is to limit the spread of infection in the country and the impact on critical services, and it has introduced some measures to limit the economic impact of the virus.

Last week, it announced an aid package for small- and medium-sized enterprises, saying it will guarantee 70% of new loans banks provide to companies that are experiencing financial difficulty due to the virus. It also temporarily reduced social security contributions and introduced company rent support

15.9 More than 400 coronavirus cases – 10% of Australia's total – are from Ruby Princess cruise ship

Source: theguardian.com,31 March,2020

Ruby Princess at Circular Quay during the disembarkation of passengers in Sydney on 19 March. More than 10% of Australia's known coronavirus cases have been linked to the ship

Exclusive: At least 440 passengers from the liner have fallen ill since being allowed to disembark without checks in Sydney

There are more than 400 confirmed cases of coronavirus across Australia from the Ruby Princess cruise ship, according to state health departments.

As of Monday, at least 440 passengers across six states and two territories had tested positive for Covid-19 after disembarking from the cruise ship, which docked twice in Sydney in March.

In a move the NSW health minister later admitted was a mistake, 2,700 passengers were allowed to disembark without checks from NSW Health on 19 March, with many boarding flights interstate. Another boatload of passengers disembarked on 8 March.

There are now more cases of Covid-19 from the Ruby Princess outside NSW than within the state.

At least five of the 19 deaths so far attributed to Covid-19 in Australia have been passengers from the ship.

On Monday, the respective state health authorities revealed there were 211 cases from Ruby Princess in NSW, 71 in South Australia, 70 in Queensland, 43 in Western Australia, 22 in the ACT, 18 in Victoria and two in the Northern Territory.

Tasmania had three confirmed cases as of Tuesday 24 March, but has not provided an update since.

This means Ruby Princess passengers account for a tenth of all national cases of coronavirus (4,512 as of Tuesday afternoon), and a quarter of all cases in South Australia – the single biggest cluster of cases in that state.

On 21 March, the NSW health minister, Brad Hazzard, admitted it had been a mistake to allow the passengers to disembark on 19 March without testing.

On 27 March, NSW Health said it would stop "providing any more national or interstate figures, just our NSW figures", despite the rise in interstate cases.

On the ship's earlier 8 March arrival, more than 360 passengers were checked by NSW Health officers and at least nine tested for Covid-19 – but all passengers were allowed to disembark, and new passengers allowed to board before the test results were returned.

Earlier, a spokesman for Princess Cruises said of the 19 March arrival: "Our onboard medical team was rigorous in its treatment of some guests who reported flu-like symptoms, and these guests were isolated.

"The ship reported these cases to NSW Health, which in turn requested swabs to be provided following the ship's arrival in Sydney, some of which subsequently tested positive for Covid-19."

NSW Health said earlier: "No cases of Covid-19 had been identified by doctors onboard before docking."

A Queensland Health spokesman said: "All other passengers have been given clear direction from Queensland Health to quarantine themselves for 14 days and phone ahead before attending their GP or attend a local fever clinic should they develop symptoms."

APRIL 2020

16.1 COVID-19 Latest Updates, April 1: Europe toll tops 30,000; UK records over 500 daily deaths for first time

Source: indianexpress.com,1 April,2020

In this photo taken Monday March 23, 2020, a victim of the Covid-19 virus is evacuated from the Mulhouse civil hospital, eastern France. The Grand Est region is now the epicenter of the outbreak in France, which has buried the third most virus victims in Europe, after Italy and Spain. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Jean-Francois Badias

At least 42,000 people have died. Italy and Spain accounted for half the deaths, while the US had over 185,000 infections, with more dead than China's official toll of about 3,300.

The coronavirus pandemic has claimed more than 30,000 lives in Europe alone, a global tally showed on Wednesday, in what the head of the United Nations has described as humanity's worst crisis since World War II. Italy and Spain bore the brunt of the crisis, accounting for three in every four deaths on the continent, as the grim tally hit another milestone even though half of the planet's population is already under some form of lockdown in a battle to halt contagion.

Spain reported a record 864 deaths in 24 hours, pushing the country's number of fatalities past 9,000. The toll is only dwarfed by Italy's, where the virus has killed nearly 12,500 people. Since emerging in China in December, COVID-19 has spread across the globe, claiming over 43,000 lives and infecting more than 860,000 people, according to an AFP tally.

UN's secretary general, António Guterres said the coronavirus pandemic as the most challenging crisis since the second world war.

In this photo taken Monday March 23, 2020, French soldiers discuss inside the military field hospital built in Mulhouse, eastern France, Monday March 23, 2020. (AP Photo/Jean-Francois Badias

Facing intense surges in the need for hospital ICU beds, European nations are on a building and hiring spree, throwing together makeshift hospitals and shipping coronavirus patients out of overwhelmed cities via high-speed trains and military jets.The key question is whether they will be able to find enough healthy medical staff to make it all work. Even as the virus slowed its growth in overwhelmed Italy and in China, where it first emerged, hospitals in Spain and France reached their breaking points and the U.S. and Britain braced for incoming waves of desperately ill people."It feels like we are in a third world country. We don't have enough masks, enough protective equipment, and by the end of the week we might be in need of more medication too," said Paris emergency worker Christophe Prudhomme to AFP. In a remarkable turnaround, rich economies where virus cases have

exploded are welcoming help from the less wealthy. Russia sent medical equipment and masks to the US on Wednesday. Cuba sent doctors to France. Turkey sent a planeload of masks, hazmat suits, goggles and disinfectants to Italy and Spain.

New York becomes US's biggest hotspot

New York has become the nation's biggest hotspot, with around 1,550 deaths statewide, most of them in New York City, which braced for things to get much worse in the coming weeks. A 1,000-bed emergency hospital set up at the mammoth Javits Convention Center began taking non-coronavirus patients to help relieve the city's overwhelmed health system. A Navy hospital ship with 1,000 beds was expected to begin accepting patients Tuesday.An indoor tennis center that was supposed to host the US Open tournament is being turned into a hospital as well. Nearly 80,000 former nurses, doctors and others are said to be stepping forward to help deal with the crisis.**Around the city, workers in**

protective gear have been seen putting bodies of victims into refrigerated trailers

Officials said they are doing background checks and making sure they are fit for duty. Around the city, workers in protective gear have been seen putting bodies of victims into refrigerated trailers. At some hospitals, like Lenox Hill in Manhattan, the trucks are parked on streets, along sidewalks and in front of apartments.

Cars and buses passed by as corpses were loaded by forklift at Brooklyn Hospital Center. People captured some of the scenes by cellphone.

Spain death toll tops 9,000 as infections pass 100,000: govt

The coronavirus death toll in Spain surged over 9,000 on Wednesday after a record 864 deaths in 24 hours, with the number of confirmed cases passing the 100,000 mark, the government said.

Spain has the world's second-highest death toll after Italy, with the virus so far claiming 9,053 lives and the number of confirmed cases reaching 102,136, although the rate of new infections continued its downward trend, health ministry figures showed.

Meanwhile, in France, nearly 500 have died in 24 hours. The country's health authorities announced an increase of 499 deaths of patients in its hospitals on Tuesday; the biggest rise since the start of the pandemic.

The heads of three global agencies warned Wednesday of the risk of a worldwide "food shortage" if authorities fail to manage the ongoing coronavirus crisis properly. Many governments around the world have put their populations on lockdown causing severe slow-downs in international trade and food supply chains.

Panic buying by people going into confinement has already demonstrated the fragility of supply chains as supermarket shelves emptied in many countries. "Uncertainty about food availability can spark a wave of export restrictions, creating a shortage on the global market," said the joint text signed by Qu Dongyu, head of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Roberto Azevedo, director of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"In the midst of the COVID-19 lockdowns, every effort must be made to ensure that trade flows as freely as possible, specially to avoid food shortage(s)" from developing, they said in their statement.

Iran's death toll from the coronavirus has passed 3,000, the health ministry said on Wednesday, as President Hassan Rouhani accused Washington of missing a "historic opportunity" to lift sanctions. Tensions between the arch-foes have soared since President Donald Trump abandoned a landmark nuclear agreement in 2018 and reimposed sweeping sanctions. Tehran has repeatedly called on Washington to reverse its policy, which has been opposed by US allies, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said the coronavirus death toll in Iran now stood at 3,036 following 138 new fatalities in the past 24 hours.

He added that 2,987 new cases had been confirmed, bringing the total to 47,593, with 15,473 of those hospitalised having recovered and been discharged.

This was the best, historic opportunity for the Americans to reverse their wrong path and for once, tell their nation they are not against the Iranian people," Rouhani said in televised comments at a cabinet meeting.

They "did not learn their lesson even during this difficult global situation," he said.

White House stresses dire US death toll predictions

President Donald Trump on Tuesday warned Americans to brace for a "hell of a bad two weeks" ahead as the White House projected there could be 100,000 to 240,000 deaths in the US from the coronavirus pandemic even if current social distancing guidelines are maintained.

But Dr Deborah Birx, part of the team leading the US response to the pandemic, says the model doesn't assume every American does everything they're supposed to do, "so it can be lower than that". In the United States, over 800 fresh deaths have been recorded on Tuesday, by far the most for a single day, news agency Reuters reported.

Turkmenistan bans media from using the word 'coronavirus'

An international media freedom watchdog says the autocratic ex-Soviet nation of Turkmenistan has banned the media from using the word "coronavirus."

Reporters Without Borders said Tuesday the word also has been removed from health information brochures distributed in schools, hospitals and workplaces. The gas-rich Central Asian nation that neighbors Iran so far has reported no cases of the new coronavirus. Iran has reported more than 44,000 cases.

Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said people wearing face masks or talking about the coronavirus are liable to be arrested by plainclothes police. Ranked last in the group's 2019 World Press Freedom Index, Turkmenistan is one of the world's most closed countries. Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov has ruled the country since 2006 through an all-encompassing personality cult that styles him as Turkmenistan's "arkadaq," or protector.

Sri Lanka records highest single-day jump in coronavirus cases

The total number of the novel coronavirus cases in Sri Lanka reached 143 with 21 fresh cases being reported on Tuesday, the highest single-day increase so far, health officials said on Wednesday, underlining that next two weeks will be crucial. The island nation has recorded only one death due to the novel coronavirus. A 65-year-old diabetic man who died on Sunday had contracted the virus from Lanka's second COVID 19 patient who was in contact with a group of Italian tourists. Another 21 COVID-19 infected patients were

reported in Sri Lanka on Tuesday, the highest single-day increase so far, increasing the total number of cases to 143, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

Europe coronavirus death toll tops 30,000

The coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 30,000 people in Europe, more than three-quarters of the deaths registered in Italy and Spain, according to an AFP tally. A total of 30,063 deaths have been recorded in Europe out of 458,601 cases, making it the continent hit hardest by COVID-19.

The most deaths were recorded in Italy, with 12,428 fatalities, followed by Spain with 8,189 and France with 3,523. The latest European figures come just a few hours after the United States announced its death toll had risen to 4,076, according to a running tally by Johns Hopkins University. That is more than twice the 2,010 recorded late Saturday and higher than the death toll in China, where the disease first emerged late last year.

Iraq extends curfew

Iraq has extended a nationwide curfew until April 19 amid a rising rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases as the country improves testing capabilities. Under the curfew, first imposed on March 17, all but essential businesses have been shuttered and inbound and outbound flights suspended in Baghdad and local airports across the country.

Twice a day clarion calls by Iraqi authorities instruct citizens to stay at home. Iraq is seeing a gradual increase in confirmed coronavirus cases as testing capabilities improve. By Tuesday, at least 50 people had died among 694 cases, according to a statement from the Health Ministry.

Israel converts missile-production facility into production of breathing machines

Israel's Defense Ministry says it has converted a missile-production facility into an assembly line producing breathing machines to help the country confront the coronavirus pandemic. The ministry announced Tuesday that the facility, operating at a factory belonging to state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries, produced its first 30 ventilators. Israel Aerospace said it built the production line in several days with Inovytec, an Israeli maker of medical equipment. Israel Aerospace says it expects the line to make hundreds of machines per week.

The facility is normally used to produce the U.S.-Israeli "Arrow" missile defense system, satellites and the "Beresheet" unmanned spacecraft that attempted a lunar landing last year. "Turning a missile production line into a ventilator assembly plant is a very complex task," said Dr. Dani Gold, the ministry official leading the effort. Israel has reported 5,300 cases of coronavirus. Twenty people have died.

16.2 Coronavirus global updates April 4: UK records fourth successive daily high with 708 deaths; 1500 dead in US in a day

Source: indianexpress.com,4 April,2020

Coronavirus latest global news updates: The total number of cases crossed one million across the world, with the US reporting the maximum number at 2,77,828. Italy reported the most deaths at 14,681.

A worker in protective coveralls against the coronavirus instructs shoppers on social distancing and acquiring a green pass on their mobile phone as they line up to enter a supermarket in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province

The United Kingdom Saturday recorded 708 more COVID-19 deaths, its fourth successive daily high, as the number of confirmed cases rose to nearly 42,000. The United States, meanwhile, reported nearly 1,500 deaths from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, the highest 24-hour death toll globally since the pandemic began, according to the John Hopkins tally. The total number of people who have died of the outbreak in the country is now 7,406. Meanwhile,

The total number of cases crossed one million across the world, with the US reporting the maximum number at 2,78,458. On the other hand, Italy reported the most deaths in the world at 14,681. A total of 2,33,689 patients have recovered from the virus globally.

China came to a standstill Saturday to mourn the patients and the medical staff who died by the virus, with the world's most populous country observing a nationwide three-minute silence. China reported one new case on Saturday in Wuhan, apart from 18 infections from people who arrived from abroad. The country counted four new deaths, all in Wuhan.

Chinese man jailed after not reporting travel

A Chinese court on Saturday sentenced a man to 18 months in jail for failing to report traveling abroad from March 1-6, refusing to answer phone calls from authorities, and having his mother lie about his whereabouts, according to a joint statement from the Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Ministry of Public Security.

The statement said the man, identified only by his surname Guo, went to work by subway in the central city of Zhengzhou on March 8-9. After developing a fever and sore throat, he was confirmed to be infected with the coronavirus. Authorities then placed more than 40 people who had been in close contact with him under quarantine.

Over 37,000 Americans stranded overseas repatriated till now, says official

The US has so far repatriated around 37,000 Americans stranded overseas due to the coronavirus pandemic and is planning to bring home another 22,000 of its citizens, many of whom are in South Asia, especially India, a senior official has said.

"We have repatriated roughly 37,000 US citizens from over 60 countries on more than 400 flights. It includes over 20,000 Americans repatriated in the past week alone," Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Ian Brownlee told reporters during a conference call on Saturday.

He said the US State Department has approximately 70 flights scheduled in the coming days which should bring back several thousand more US citizens. "South Asia now has the most US citizens wishing to return. So far the US has brought home almost 1,000 Americans from South Asia and are working aggressively to assist thousands more who have expressed an interest in returning," Brownlee said.

"The total number we're looking at overseas at this point is about 22,000. The greatest number of those certainly the plurality of those are in South and Central Asia, many of them in India, he added.

Trump asks Americans to wear masks outside as public health measure

US President Donald Trump has recommended all Americans to voluntary use non-medical masks as an additional public health measure to fight the coronavirus.

Medical workers in protective suits push a patient on a stretcher in front of the Policlinico Tor Vergata, where patients suffering from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) are hosted, in Rome, Italy

Citing the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Trump urged people to wear face coverings like scarves or homemade cloth masks, but to keep medical-grade masks available for the health workers.

The CDC is advising the use of non-medical cloth face covering as an additional voluntary public health measure, Trump told reporters during a press briefing at the White House on Friday. "The CDC is not recommending the use of medical-grade or surgical-grade masks. Those needs to be used for medical people working to save lives of Americans. Medical protective gear must be reserved for the front-line healthcare workers who are performing those vital services," he said.

CDC has recommended that Americans were a basic cloth or fabric masks that can be either purchased online or simply made at home.

Virus patients in Spain get five-star hotel quarantine

A trio of discharged coronavirus patients in Spain were given a five-star hotel for their quarantine period. The hotel, which features contemporary decor and bathrooms with marble finishing, was converted into a clinic in three days.

In Bra, in heart of Italy's coronavirus outbreak

"Some patients arrive thinking that they were taken out of hospital to be left to die, many people are frightened. I try to make them forget all that," said Enrique Aranda, a worker, wearing mask and gloves. "I don't let them out of the ambulance until I get a smile out of them. I want them to enter in another way, that they see that they aren't in a hospital anymore, it is a hotel."

Instead of arriving with a suitcase, the hotel's new clients carry bags containing just a few personal belongings and their medical report. They are not welcomed by bellhops, but by a team of nurses wearing green or blue gowns, gloves and face masks. Hotels across the country have been converted into medical care centres to free up beds in hospitals which have been flooded with COVID-19 cases.

FIFA postpones U-17 Women's World Cup in India due to COVID-19

The FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup to be held in India in November was on Saturday postponed by football's governing body due to the worsening COVID-19 pandemic. The

women's age group showpiece was to be held at five venues in the country –Kolkata, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Ahmedabad and Navi Mumbai — from November 2-21.

The tournament was to be competed among 16 teams, with hosts India being automatic qualifiers. It was to be India's maiden appearance in the U-17 Women's World Cup.

The decision was taken by the FIFA-Confederations working group which was recently established by the Bureau of the FIFA Council to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. "New dates will be identified," FIFA said in a statement.

The working group recommended the Bureau of FIFA Council to "postpone the FIFA Under-20 Women's World Cup Panama/Costa Rica 2020 – originally scheduled for August/September 2020 – and the FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup India 2020 – originally scheduled for November 2020."

It was also decided "to create a sub-working group on the women's international match calendar to consider potential changes to the calendar and dates of postponed FIFA final tournaments".

16.3 COVID-19 Daily Update: April 8, 2020

Source: spglobal.com,8 April,2020

After 11 weeks of lockdown, Chinese authorities lifted restrictions on the city of Wuhan's 11 million people today. Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, and Norway plan to loosen crisis-related guidelines on their populations in coming weeks. These countries were some of the first to implement anti-coronavirus measures on movement—while many sovereigns, including Thailand and Russia, instituted nationwide stay-at-home orders last week. Today, the European Commission recommended its 30 countries keep their external borders (except for essential traffic) closed until May 15.

"Now is not the time to relax measures," the World Health Organization's director for Europe, Hans Kluge, said today. "It is the time to once again double and triple our collective efforts to drive toward suppression with the whole support of society."

"When we have the curve under control, we will shift toward a new normality and toward the reconstruction of our economy," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said.

"It's like walking a tightrope," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said. "If we stand still, we may fall. If we go too fast, it may soon go wrong. We don't know when we'll be on firm ground again."

U.S. President Donald Trump asserted on Twitter that the United States will reduce restrictions "sooner rather than later."

"If 'back to normal' means acting like there never was a coronavirus problem, I don't think that's going to happen until we do have a situation where you can completely protect the population," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S.'s top coronavirus expert and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. "But when we say getting back to normal, we mean something very different from what we're going through right now. Because right now, we're in a very intense mitigation."

"Please don't politicize this virus," W.H.O. Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, addressing President Trump's criticisms on the premier health organization's handling of the crisis. "If you want to be exploited and you want to have many more body bags, then you do it. If you don't want many more body bags, then you refrain from politicizing it."

In a report sent to the Trump Administration, the National Academy of Sciences warned that the coronavirus may not diminish in summertime with warmer weather, confounding hopes for this crisis to wane at the turn of the season. "There is some evidence to suggest that SARS-CoV-2 may transmit less efficiently in environments with high ambient temperature and humidity; however, given the lack of host immunity global, this reduction in transmission efficiency may not lead to a significant reduction in disease spread without the concomitant adoption of major public health interventions … The other coronaviruses causing potentially serious human illnesses, including both SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, have not demonstrated any evidence of seasonality following their emergence," the report said. "Given that countries currently in 'summer' climates, such as Australia and Iran, are experiencing rapid virus spread, a decrease in cases with increases in humidity and temperature elsewhere should not be assumed."

As countries take further measures to protect their populations and economies, the effects on businesses and markets remain negative. The global surge in COVID-19 cases, pressures of the global recession, and overall weaker capital market conditions are weighing on corporate credit quality. The pandemic's erosion of global GDP growth has hit emerging markets especially hard.

The economic shock could increase credits costs for Chinese banks by nearly $224 billion in 2020, according to S&P Global Ratings.

S&P Global Ratings also expects credit conditions in Latin America to worsen as the pandemic advances in the region.

Because of the correlation of most infrastructure assets with the economy, their regulated nature, and the measures imposed so far by several governments to contain the pandemic that have hampered cash flow generation, S&P

Global Ratings expects this sector to remain highly vulnerable in the short- to medium-term. Downside risks are still significant.

Japan is estimated to lose out on about $5 billion of inbound and domestic consumption this year as a result of the postponement of the Olympic Games.

The nation, which for months had low infection rates, is now under a state of emergency due to a recent spike in cases.

As the U.S. Federal Reserve began taking extensive action to limit the economic implications of the coronavirus in the U.S., all central bankers "viewed the near-term U.S. economic outlook as having deteriorated sharply in recent weeks and as having become profoundly uncertain. Many participants had repeatedly downgraded their outlook of late in response to the rapidly evolving situation.

All saw U.S. economic activity as likely to decline in the coming quarter and viewed downside risks to the economic outlook as having increased significantly," according to minutes of the policy-making Federal Open Market Committee's March 15 meeting.

Now, the Fed is fielding calls from Congress and energy regulators to give electric, gas, and water utilities easier access to short-term loans amid commitments to suspend customer disconnects due to the pandemic, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence.

The 23-country OPEC+ alliance is aiming for a global oil-output cut of 10 million-15 million barrels a day, including producers outside the group, when ministers meet Thursday for a critical summit to shore up the coronavirus-stricken market, Kuwaiti oil minister Khaled al-Fadhel told S&P Global Platts.

Many details remain in flux, but all OPEC+ members are committed to clinching a deal, Mr. Fadhel said.

Saudi Arabia's attempt to negotiate a global pact with Russia to rescue oil prices from the coronavirus crisis will climax tomorrow, when ministers from OPEC and other key countries meet virtually to settle the geopolitical conflict and determine production cuts.

16.4 Why There Are So Many Different Guidelines For Face Masks For The Public

Source: npr.org,10 April,2020

A do-it-yourself mask culture is springing up in the Czech Republic. This woman was photographed on the Charles Bridge in Prague on March 28.

On Feb. 29, the U.S. surgeon general Dr. Jerome Adams tweeted that masks do not offer any benefit to the average citizen.

About a month later, on Friday, April 3, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that Americans wear "cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials ... as an additional, voluntary public health measure." This isn't the only example of a change or updating of mask-wearing policies during the coronavirus crisis. It's happened in countries around the world — from Singapore to Austria to Kenya (which just announced one of the world's strictest policies — police are arresting anyone caught without a mask in their vehicle, on a bus or in a public place.)

Meanwhile, some health agencies have taken a stand that calls for mask-wearing in public from the early stages of the outbreak — Hong Kong on Jan. 24, mainland China on Jan. 31.

In Wuhan, China, and other parts of East Asia, wearing masks in public has been commonplace since the SARS outbreak in the early 2000s. This photo was taken on January 23, about a week before China called on citizens to wear masks as a way to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus.

To understand why mask guidelines have been so varied, NPR reached out to specialists in academia and in government. What we learned is that face mask guidelines are about science — but go beyond.

The reasons for a policy may have to do with practical considerations like the national supply of masks but may also reflect cultural values and history.

Shifting Guidelines

In order to understand the range of guidelines, the first issue to consider is the data on the potential benefits of masks. As with so many points surrounding the novel coronavirus, there's not a clear-cut finding.

But there is emerging research and data that suggests transmission of COVID-19 by asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals. Such research has been coming out at least since February; the latest report is from Singapore on April 1. These studies emphasize that people can spread the virus before realizing that they are sick — and that wearing a mask in public could help keep the infected person from spreading infectious droplets.

Among the reasons for reluctance on the part of some health agencies and places to urge mask wearing is the concern about the shortage of masks for medical workers. That's why the World Health Organization has stayed consistent in its recommendation, Margaret Harris of its coronavirus response team told NPR. And that position is: yes to masks for health-care workers and people with symptoms, no for the general public.

WHO and other agencies have also raised concerns about the potential problems that could arise due to the wearing of a mask — for example, a false sense of security that would undermine other preventive measures or self-contamination from touching a contaminated mask.

Epidemiologist Sergio Brusin who works on the European Center for Disease Control's coronavirus response, offered NPR a similar rationale in an interview. However, ECDC only mentioned that face masks aren't effective in protecting the wearer on its public-facing website. A number of other health agencies — like WHO and the CDC — offered little explanation on their website.

The result of these sometimes incomplete messages: "I think that if you talk to even the highly informed members of the general public and ask[ed] them a week, or two or three weeks ago, if the face masks work, they would say 'no' because they would have read CDC guidance, WHO guidance," says Lawrence Gostin, professor of global health law at Georgetown University and director of the World Health Organization Center on National & Global Health Law.

"But that wouldn't have been correct. Based upon the science [about potential benefits of masks for the public] we knew at the time."

Governments should not have downplayed the importance of face masks [as a protective measure for the public], says Leiyu Shi, who researches comparative health systems and health policy at Johns Hopkins University, "because it will make them [seem] very foolish when they change their stance. Again and again," Shi says.

In response to NPR's inquiry about its April 3 guideline change, the CDC said its change was driven by "increasing and widespread transmission of the new coronavirus across the country," citing studies published in February and March showing pre-symptomatic and a

symptomatic spread. A CDC spokesperson also noted reports from Asian countries showing that a cloth face covering can reduce the chance of spreading respiratory droplets when people need to be in places with others.

Asked by NPR about the Surgeon General's earlier tweet about the ineffectiveness of masks, the office of the Surgeon General issued a statement Thursday noting that back in February Dr. Adams was following the CDC, WHO and other health organizations, which all recommended against wearing masks as a way to protect the person wearing them. The statement said that the understanding on spread from infected individuals who have not shown symptoms has since changed.

The Impact of SARS On Mask Guidance

The new rule in Austria is that, as of this week, masks are a must when shopping. On April 1, supermarket employees handed out masks to customers as they arrived.

For Jeremy Lim, Adjunct Associate professor of public health from the National University of Singapore School of Public Health, East Asia's threshold for taking action on face masks

and more potentially preventive measures was sparked by SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, another coronavirus that swept through the region in 2003.

"Policymakers will always have to live with uncertainty and incomplete information,' Lim says. "For East Asian countries, the attitude was 'better to be safe than to be sorry.' "

Asked about the new CDC position in the U.S., public health academics like Gostin and Shi believe the guideline changes in the U.S. could have come sooner, given the emerging evidence of potential benefits.

But it's not that simple just to issue guidelines based on science, noted many of the experts interviewed by NPR. Before issuing guidelines, governments also weigh how likely the public would be to follow them, they said.

The existing culture of mask-wearing helped Asian societies in this regard — and is partly a legacy of SARS. After surviving the outbreak 17 years ago, many people in this part of the world began wearing masks even if they just had a cold — to protect others but also for a sense of being protected from others, even if there isn't scientific data to back that up.

"The mask is almost like a talisman," says Harris of the WHO's coronavirus response team. "People feel more secure and protected."

The culture is different in Europe and the U.S., where people are less familiar with the idea of wearing a mask to protect others. People may think the face mask wearers they see want "to be protected from them," Harris says.

To change the culture regarding masks or any other public health intervention, the U.S. needs to issue consistent messages from many different levels of government, says Ross Brownson, professor of Public Health at Washington University in St. Louis. He researched how research is translated into evidence-based policies.

This is because some "listen to the scientists or the Dr. Faucis [the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases] of the world. There's another group that will listen to their local mayor. There's another group who might resonate with the governor. There's another group that might listen to President Trump." Brownson says.

Brownson, Shi and Gostin all say that the heads of government should lead by example, practicing what they preach.

"It would be a complete shock to the American public to see widespread face mask use," says Gostin. "And I would like to see our leadership doing it to model that good behavior."

President Trump said last Friday, after the CDC updated guidelines were announced, that he would not follow them: "Sitting in the oval office, behind that beautiful resolute desk, the

great resolute desk, I think wearing a face mask as I greet presidents, prime ministers, dictators, kings, queens. I don't know, somehow I don't see it for myself."

"The president's, you know, an awfully powerful person. And if he doesn't think he needs it, why should I?" Gostin says.

Different societies, different cultures

The matter of masks is also tied up with the willingness of citizens to heed advice from the government.

In "South Korea, for instance, or even Singapore, a recommendation from the government is taken "really literally and in a very stringent way," says Brusin of ECDC. Other sources interviewed for this story suggest that is because there may be more trust in government than in western societies.

"Other countries know that they have to communicate more to convince the citizens to abide by the values, recommendations, and culture has an influence into that," Brusin adds.

America is a "fiercely individualistic" country, says Gostin, where many might feel "you couldn't force me to wear a mask." Other researchers agreed with his assessment.

But the mask-wearing policies in other country do not necessarily reflect a more authoritian government, say some of NPR's interviewees. "Perhaps we have a bit too glibly dismissed the Chinese approach by saying that it's an authoritarian system." Lim says, "People are obedient, but it's really not about being [in] authoritarian [systems]. It's fundamentally accepting that society comes before self and putting the greater good ahead of one's own interests."

And even while discussion of public mask-wearing continues, the academics interviewed for this article agree that social distancing is the most important measure the public can take to fight the virus.

16.5 N.Y. Deaths Top 9,000; New U.S. Cases Rise 5.4%: Virus Update

Source: bloomberg.com,12 April,2020

New York State has one of the world's highest death tolls, but fewer patients went to hospitals, a positive trend noted by the governor. Fewer new deaths were reported in hard-hit Italy and France.

A medic prepares to unload Covid-19 patients arriving to the Montefiore Medical Center Moses Campus in the Bronx borough of New York City on April 7

Tracking COVID-19

616,228
New cases reported worldwide, Dec. 19

1,692,872
Total deaths reported worldwide

196,295 in U.S.
Most new cases today

+11%
Change in MSCI World Index of global stocks since Wuhan lockdown, Jan. 23

-0.8112
Change in U.S. treasury bond yield since Wuhan lockdown, Jan. 23

3.7%
Global GDP Tracker (annualized), Nov.

The rate of increase for new U.S. cases fell for a second day. A Fed banker cast doubt on a rapid recovery after economic life restarts.

France, Germany, Italy and Spain reported a slowdown in new cases, allowing governments to seek ways for

safely easing lockdowns.

The U.K. became the fifth nation to record more than 10,000 deaths.

Key Developments

- Coronavirus Tracker: Global cases exceed 1.8 million; deaths top 113,000

- Pork producer warns of meat shortages

- NBA owner Mark Cuban sees fanless game

- Cruise passengers spend Easter on "ghost ship"

- Volatile data complicates ending Europe lockdown

- China's Harbin tightens measures

Here's where cases of coronavirus have been identified   See the graphic
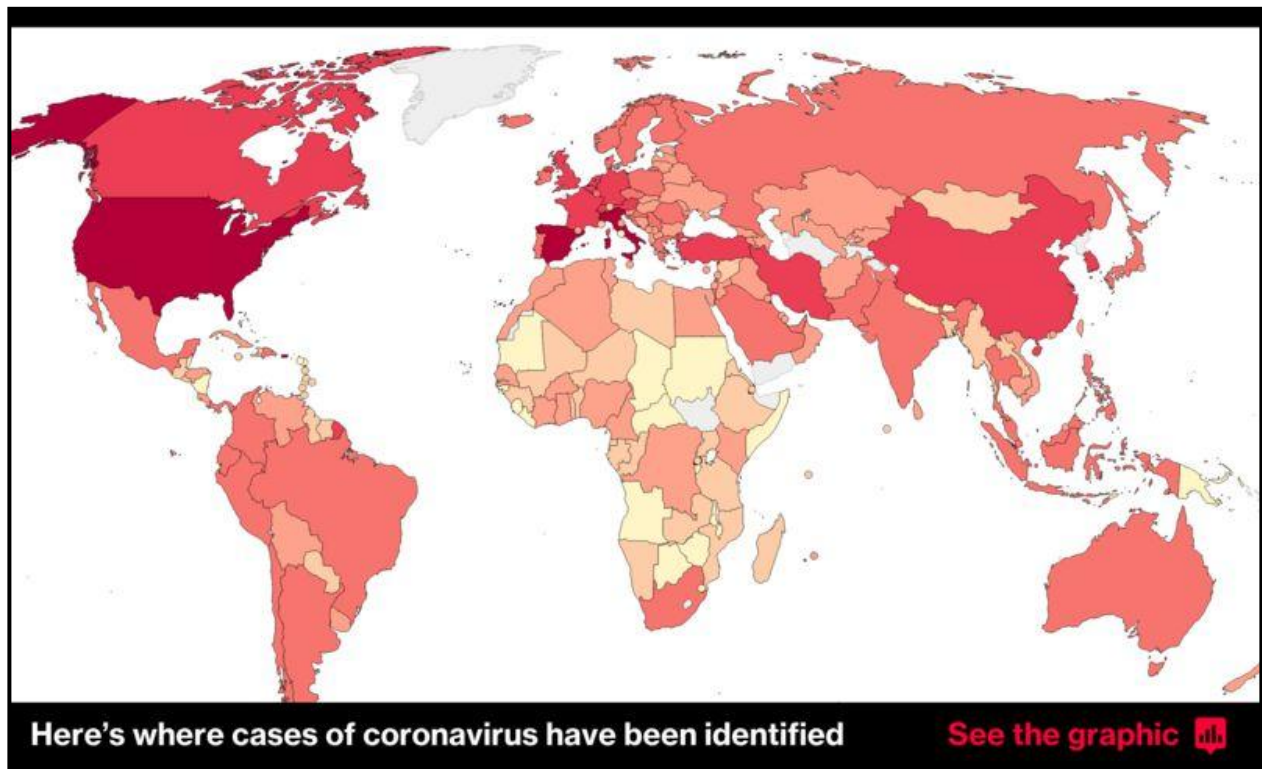
N.J. Starts Planning for Possible Reopening (4:45 p.m. NY)

New Jersey reported an additional 168 deaths from Covid-19, bringing the statewide total to 2,350. Cases climbed by 6% to 61,850, a sixth straight day the increase was less than 10%.

Murphy said on CNN that said he and his staff spent time over the weekend "beginning to war-game" a possible reopening. But he said there won't be any such move until the virus crisis has abated.

"Right now, the house is on fire, and job number one is to put the fire out," he said.

U.S. Case Rate Falls for Second Day (4 p.m. NY)

U.S. cases rose 5.4% from a day earlier to more than 542,000 by midday Sunday, according to data collected by Johns Hopkins University and Bloomberg News. The rise was below the 7.9% average daily increase over the past week.

Cases rose almost 10% for the 24 hours ended on April 8, according to the data, a rate that fell to 7.9% on Friday and 5.6% on Saturday.

New York's cases rose about 4%. South Dakota experienced a 17% rise from Saturday, bringing the total to 730.

Elsewhere:

Florida added six deaths, for a statewide total to 452, the Department of Health reported. The state has 19,347 total cases. While testing has increased, only 11% are positive.

Rhode Island reported seven new deaths, bringing the total to 63. The Department of Health added 316 cases, for a total of 2,665.

Philadelphia added 16 deaths, pushing the toll to 176, with half identified as long-term care facility residents. Of the deaths, 65% were of people over age 70.

Turkish Minister Quits After Chaos (4:30 p.m. NY)

Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu quit after a hastily announced weekend lockdown led thousands of people to spill onto streets, raising the risk of a new wave of infections. Soylu said on Twitter that he took full responsibility for the lockdown.

Later Sunday, President Tayyip Erdogan said he would not accept the resignation.

The minister was criticized after giving two hours warning late Friday of the action, abruptly ending weeks of social distancing measures as Turks flocked to buy groceries.

Pork Producer Warns of Shortages (3:15 p.m. NY)

The world's biggest pork producer warned that the closure of processing factories as employees test positive for coronavirus is pushing meat supplies "perilously close to the edge" of shortfalls.

Smithfield Foods Inc. said it will idle its Sioux Falls, South Dakota, pork-processing facility -- which accounts for 4% to 5% of U.S. production -- after state officials reported more than 200 cases of Covid-19 at that company alone.

"It is impossible to keep our grocery stores stocked if our plants are not running," Chief Executive Officer Ken Sullivan said in the statement.

Mark Cuban Predicts Fanless NBA Games (2 p.m. NY)

Mark Cuban, the owner of the National Basketball Association's Dallas Mavericks, said crowding back into sports stadiums and arenas won't happen until the "science" is in place to make people feel safe.

"I think initially we'll play just for the TV cameras, with essential personnel and players," the billionaire said on "Fox News Sunday."

"People aren't going to just venture outside," he said. "They're not going to go to large gatherings. They're not going to feel confident right off the bat. There's going to be a lot of trepidation."

France Cases Lowest in a Week (1:40 p.m. NY)

France's new coronavirus cases fell to the lowest in a week and the number of intensive-care patients dropped for a fourth day. Infections rose by 2,937 to 132,591 cases, the smallest increase since April 5, the health ministry said in an emailed statement. The death toll rose by 561, the fewest in four days, to 14,393.

"We're observing the beginning of a very high leveling off," the health ministry said. "But we must remain vigilant because hospitals and ICUs are taking care of a very large number of patients."

Turkey Deaths Climb to 1,198 (1:30 p.m. NY)

Turkey reported 97 new fatalities, bringing the death toll to 1,198 amid a two-day lockdown in major cities. The country had 4,789 new cases, a 9.2% rise from 52,167 the previous day, according to data published by Health Minister Fahrettin Koca, bringing the total to 56,956.

Mexico Exchange Chairman Dies (1:20 p.m. NY)

The chairman of Mexico's stock exchange, Jaime Ruiz Sacristan, died early Sunday more than three weeks after he was hospitalized with coronavirus. He was 70. A statement from Bolsa Mexicana de Valores SAB didn't cite a specific cause.

Ruiz, chairman since 2015, was among a cluster of high-profile Mexican executives who had tested positive after returning from a ski-resort vacation to Vail, Colorado, on a private jet.

Italy Daily Deaths Fewest Since March 19 (12:10 p.m. NY)

Italy reported 431 new deaths in the past day, the fewest in more than three weeks, as declining numbers of intensive care patients pointed to a lessening severity of the country's outbreak. The country had 619 fatalities a day earlier.

The daily count is the lowest since March 19, when Italy registered 427 dead. Total fatalities reached 19,899, the most in Europe.

The country reported 4,092 new cases, compared with 4,694 a day earlier, civil protection officials said.

Fed Official Warns of Flare Ups (12:05 p.m. NY)

Without an effective therapy or a vaccine, the U.S. could expect 18 months of rolling shutdowns as the outbreak recedes and then returns, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis President Neel Kashkari said.

"We're looking around the world. As they relax the economic controls, the virus flares back up again," Kashkari said Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation."

"This could be a long hard road that we have ahead of us until we get either to an effective therapy or a vaccine," he said. "It's hard for me to see a V-shaped recovery under that scenario."

N.Y. Deaths Fall for Third Day (11:40 a.m. NY)

New York State had 758 deaths in the past 24 hours, down from 783 the day before and the third straight day of declines, Governor Andrew Cuomo said at his daily press conference.

It's the sixth straight day of more than 700 deaths in the state, a fact Cuomo called "tragic." Total deaths are 9,385, exceeded only by the tolls in Italy, Spain, France and the U.K.

Cases reached 188,694, a rise of 8,236, the Department of Health reported, around one-in-ten of reported cases around the world.

D.C. Mayor Sets Reopening Criteria (11 a.m. NY)

Washington will lift restrictions when the number of cases, deaths and hospitalizations shows "sustained periods of decrease," Mayor Muriel Bowser said as President Donald

Trump hints at easing limits by May 1. Bowser said D.C. cases will peak in June, later than in other cities.

"We're going to follow what the data on the ground tells us," Bowser said on "Fox News Sunday" when asked about the president's comments.

Deaths in U.K. Top 10,000 (10:54 a.m. NY)

The U.K. became the fifth country to record more than 10,000 deaths from the coronavirus. A daily increase of 737 brings the total number of Britons to die from the disease to 10,612, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

"The U.K. is likely to be certainly one of the worst, if not the worst affected country in Europe," Jeremy Farrar, a member of the scientific panel advising the government on the pandemic, told the BBC on Sunday.

Fauci Says Reopening Could Start in May (9:48 a.m. NY)

Parts of the U.S. may be ready in May to ease emergency measures taken against the pandemic but there's no universal "light switch" to flip on, Anthony Fauci said.

"It could probably start at least in some ways maybe next month," Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday.

Boris Johnson Released (8:28 a.m. NY)

The U.K. prime minister has been discharged from the hospital and will continue his recovery at the government's country residence Chequers, a government spokesman said in a statement on Sunday.

"On the advice of his medical team, the PM will not be immediately returning to work," the spokesman said.

Boris Johnson thanked NHS staff yesterday, saying "I owe them my life."

China's Harbin Tightens Measures (8:27 a.m. NY)

The northeastern Chinese city of Harbin extended its quarantine for certain visitor arrivals.

Arrivals from overseas or domestic regions with high risks are required to quarantine for 14 days at designated site first, then another 14 days at home, according to a statement from the municipal government. These visitors would also required to take two nucleic acid tests and a serum antibody test.

Portugal Cases Rise, Fewer in ICU (8 a.m. NY)

Portugal reported a higher daily number of new confirmed coronavirus cases, while the number of patients in intensive care fell.

There were 598 new cases in a day, up from 515 on Saturday, taking the total to 16,585, the government said on Sunday. The total number of deaths increased to 504 from 470 reported through Saturday morning. Hospitalizations rose to 1,177 from 1,175, while patients in intensive care fell to 228 from 233.

Netherlands Has Fewer Than 100 Deaths in Day (7:45 a.m NY)

The Netherlands recorded 94 new fatalities from the virus, the first time since March 30 that the number dropped below 100. The 4% increase to 2,737 is the slowest since the total tally hit double digits in the middle of March. The increase in new hospital admissions remained at their low point of 2%, whereas total confirmed cases rose a stable 5% to 25,587.

Spanish Cases Fall (5:47 p.m. HK)

Spain reported 619 deaths from the coronavirus on Sunday as the total number of people who have died in the country approaches 17,000. Fewer new cases of the disease were reported than the day before. There were 4,167 new infections in the 24 hours through Sunday, pushing the total above 166,000, according to Health Ministry data.

Iran Lifting Travel Ban (3:50 p.m. HK)

Iran will lift a ban on civilians traveling between provinces from April 20, President Hassan Rouhani said on state television. The announcement follows the easing of some social-distancing regulations on the business sector as Iran tries to alleviate the virus's toll on its sanctions-hit economy. The death toll in Iran has risen to 4,357, with over 70,000 known cases.

China Stops Trial of a Gilead Drug (11:45 a.m. HK)

A Chinese trial of Gilead Sciences Inc.'s antiviral drug remdesivir was stopped after failing to enroll enough patients with severe symptoms, the company's Chief Executive Officer Daniel O'Day wrote in an open letter dated April 10.

China previously said it would announce the results of two remdesivir trials for patients with mild to severe symptoms on April 27. The discontinuation of the severe patient trial came as the number of cases dropped in China. "The publication of data from the China remdesivir trials rests with the Chinese investigators, but we have been informed that the

study in patients with severe symptoms was stopped due to stalled enrollment," O'Day said.

16.6 Nearly 2 million cases have been confirmed across globe

Source: nbcnews.com,13 April,2020

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases worldwide is nearing 2 million, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. The death toll is nearly 120,000.

The university revised its count Monday night after previously reporting the number of cases had topped 2 million.

The U.S. has surpassed Italy as the country with the highest number of coronavirus deaths with 23,423 recorded by Tuesday night and nearly 580,000 cases, according to NBC News figures. Wyoming recorded its first death Monday, meaning all 50 states now have at least one fatality in the pandemic.

A woman wearing a face mask walks in a deserted street in central Moscow on April 13, 2020 during a strict lockdown in Russia to stop the spread of the COVID-19, caused by the novel coronavirus.

After a fall in daily death tolls, Spain and Italy, two countries hard-hit by the virus, were set to begin easing lockdown measures on Monday.

But French President Emmanuel Macron said France's lockdown will extend on until May 11 as the country recorded 574 new deaths Monday.

16.7 China revises Wuhan Covid numbers, deaths go up by nearly 40%

Source: hindustantimes.com,17 April,2020

The revision of Covid-19 numbers comes amid global doubts of the numbers that China's national health commission (NHC) had been releasing daily since the end of January.

The total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Wuhan as of the end of April 16 was revised up by 325 to 50,333, and the number of fatalities up by 1290 to 3869, state media reported Friday

China on Friday revised upwards by nearly 1,300 deaths Covid-19 fatalities in the first pandemic epicentre, the city of Wuhan, where the virus first emerged in late last year.

The addition, reported by state news agency Xinhua on Friday, brings the nationwide death toll up by nearly 40% to 4,636, the majority coming from the central Chinese Hubei province where Wuhan is located.

The revision of Covid-19 numbers comes amid global doubts of the numbers that China's national health commission (NHC) had been releasing daily since the end of January.

It is set to bring into question the official numbers released by China.

Wuhan authorities also increased the number of confirmed cases by 325.

The total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Wuhan as of the end of April 16 was revised up by 325 to 50,333, and the number of fatalities up by 1290 to 3869, state media reported Friday.

China had until Friday staunchly defended the official numbers of Covid-19, dismissing all suspicion as fuelled by western governments and antagonistic media reporting.

In a notification released on Friday, the Wuhan municipal headquarters for the Covid-19 epidemic prevention and control said the revisions were made in accordance with related laws and regulations as well as the principle of being responsible for history, the people and the deceased.

The notification listed four reasons for the discrepancy.

Four reasons for the data discrepancies were listed in the notification.

It said that a surging number of patients at the early stage of the epidemic "…overwhelmed medical resources and the admission capacity of medical institutions.

Some patients died at home without having been treated in hospitals."

It added that overworked doctors were "preoccupied" with saving lives and treating patients, which resulted in late reporting of Covid-19 toll.

The notice said that due to a rapid increase of designated hospitals for treating Covid-19 patients, including those administered by "…ministries, Hubei province, Wuhan city and its districts, those affiliated to companies, as well as private hospitals and makeshift hospitals, a few medical institutions were not linked to the epidemic information network and failed to report their data in time".

The registered information of some of the deceased patients was incomplete, and there were repetitions and mistakes in the reporting, the health authorities added.

"What lie behind epidemic data are the lives and health of the general public, as well as the credibility of the government," an official in Wuhan told state media, adding that the timely revision of the figures, among other things, shows respect for every single life.

16.8 Revised estimates say there will be 15,000 Covid-19 cases in Pakistan in April: PM Imran Khan

Source: indiatoday.in,18 april,2020

"The pressure we expected earlier can now be felt next month," Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said during a recent press conference.

A disinfecting tunnel in Pakistan's Peshawar photographed on April 15

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Saturday said that the estimation of confirmed novel coronavirus cases in the country has been revised to 15,000 for the month of April. This comes as positive news for the Pakistan government which had estimated as many as 50,000 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the country by the end of April of this year.

The number of confirmed Covid-19 cases is lower than projected, PM Imran Khan said. However, he warned the citizens of Pakistan that the country could face "difficulties" starting mid-May and advised them to be careful going forward.

"Our initial projections said that we would have 50,000 cases by April 25. Thankfully that's not the case. Our new projections suggest that we will have 12,000 to 15,000 coronavirus patients. The pressure we expected earlier can now be felt next month," PM Khan said while speaking at a press conference.

As of April 18, Pakistan has 7,481 confirmed cases of Covid-19. The country recorded 23 coronavirus-related deaths within 24 hours on Friday. This development came at the same time as the Pakistan government's announcement that it is considering a partial lifting of the nationwide lockdown in order to allow some businesses to run.

16.9 Photos show impact of temporary air pollution drops across the world from coronavirus lockdown

Source: cnbc.com,23 April,2020

- Air pollution has dropped to unprecedented levels across the world as major cities and countries impose lockdown measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

- As humans stay inside, the environment is temporarily changing: wild animals are roaming the streets and some typically smog-filled skies are clear.

- Despite the rare glimpse of natural beauty like snow-crested mountains and clearer skylines, scientists warn against celebrating any short-term benefits from the air pollution drop as levels will rebound once global restrictions lift.

Air pollution has dropped to unprecedented levels across the world as major cities and countries impose lockdown measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

More than 2.6 million cases of Covid-19 and at least 183,820 deaths have been documented worldwide, according to Johns Hopkins University.

As humans stay inside, the environment is temporarily changing: wild animals are roaming the streets and some typically smog-filled skies are clear.

People in Punjab, India say they can see the snow peaks of the Himalayas, a view that for decades has been blocked by air pollution.

New Delhi alone has recorded a 60% drop in fine particulate matter, the world's deadliest air pollutant.

Los Angeles, the traffic-congested city with some of the highest smog levels in the U.S., has seen nitrogen levels drop significantly and rush-hour traffic essentially vanish.

Despite the rare glimpse of natural beauty like snow-crested mountains and clearer skylines, scientists warn against celebrating any short-term benefits from the decline in air pollution since levels will rebound once global restrictions lift.

Langtang range seen from Kathmandu

The Swayambhunath Stupa is seen here during the sixth day of a nationwide lockdown over Covid-19 concerns in Kathmandu, Nepal on Sunday, March 29, 2020.

The Langtang range is visible from Kathmandu during the sixth day the nationwide coronavirus lockdown in Nepal on March 29.

The restrictions have decreased air pollution in Kathmandu Valley, which consistently ranks among the most polluted areas in the world.

India Gate war memorial in New Delhi

The top picture shows the India Gate war memorial on October 17, 2019, months before the nationwide lockdown. The bottom picture shows the memorial after air pollution levels began to drop during the lockdown in New Delhi on April 8.

Downtown Los Angeles with clear blue skies

Smog has cleared up over downtown Los Angeles during the coronavirus pandemic on April 17. The skyline is usually obscured by air pollution, but nitrogen levels have plummeted in the city since the beginning of quarantine.

Less smog in Jakarta

The top picture shows a typical view of high-rise buildings covered by smog in the Indonesian capital on July 4, 2019. The bottom picture shows the same view of Jakarta during the pandemic on April 16.

Empty highways in Los Angeles

Traffic plummeted on highways in Los Angeles once the virus restrictions were imposed at midnight on March 20.

Air quality improves in Manila

In Philippines' capital city, fine particulate matter — the world's deadliest air pollutant — dropped by 180% since quarantine measures were imposed in Metro Manila on March 16, according to the Environmental Pollution Studies Laboratory of The Institute of Environmental Science and Meteorology.

Air pollution plummets across Spain
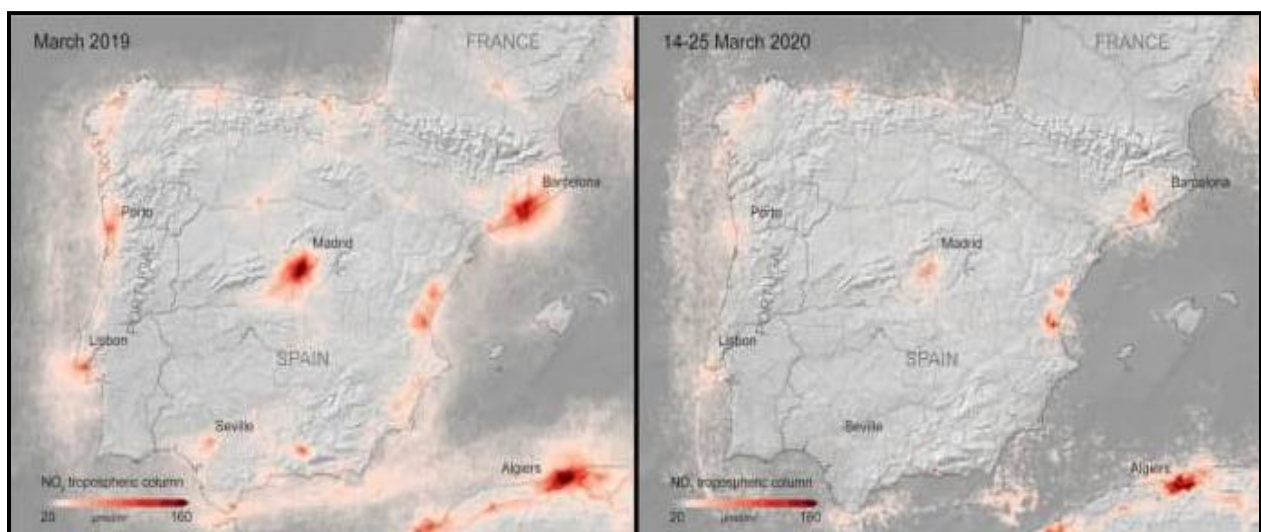
Satellite imagery distributed by the European Space Agency shows the decline in average nitrogen dioxide concentrations from air pollution across Spain from March 14 to March 25.

Clearer skies in Paris

The Eiffel Tower is seen clearly from the Parisian suburb of Saint-Cloud on April 22.

16.10 COVID-19: Livelihood of 1.6 bln informal workers worldwide at risk, warns ILO

Source: downtoearth.org.in, 30 April,2020

Approximately 164 mln informal workers in Africa stuck under complete lockdown measures

Approximately 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy — nearly half of the global workforce — was in immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed because of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said in a report on April 29, 2020.

Close to 1.1 billion workers lived and worked in countries that were in a total lockdown situation, with an additional 304 million in countries that had partial lockdown measures, as of April 22, according to the ILO.

These workers together represent 67 per cent of informal employment across the world.

916 million workers in Asia, Africa under full lockdown

Asia and Africa both account for nearly 916 million workers from the informal economy, with an additional 178 million in countries that are in partial lockdown. There are 772 million informal workers under complete lockdown in the Asia Pacific region alone, according to ILO estimates, with 77 million in countries with partial lockdown measures.

The number of workers from Africa stuck under complete lockdown measures numbered close to 164 million, while close to 101 million informal workers were under partial lockdown measures.

Countries that had full lockdown measures primarily enforced three measures on social distancing, according to the ILO report:

- Mandatory workplace closure

- Mandatory internal travel controls

- Mandatory shutdown of public transport

Partial lockdown measures, according to the report, meant that at least one of the above three measures were mandatory.

COVID-19 to cost 305 million full-time jobs in second quarter

The ILO report raised concerns over the sharp decline in working hours across the world because of disruptions in the labour market from lockdown measures. The second (current) quarter of 2020 shows a far-reaching impact with respect to the number of working hours, according to the ILO estimates. Almost 11 per cent of working hours across the world were projected to be wiped out in this quarter, said the ILO report.

This loss of working hours is equal to nearly 305 million full-time jobs, the report pointed out. The losses increased by 56 per cent since the last ILO estimates that predicted the loss of 195 million full-time jobs on April 7.

This increase in the loss of jobs occurred because of extensions of lockdown measures, said the ILO report. In the first quarter, 130 million fill-time jobs were estimated to be at risk. Thus, 175 million more jobs are projected to be at risk in the second quarter. The drop in working hours in this quarter of 2020 is projected to be worse than the last ILO estimates.

Africa to be hit hard

Close to 10 per cent of the working hours — equal to 37 million full-time jobs — may be lost this quarter in Africa.

Around 6.6 times more jobs may be lost in the second quarter from the COVID-19 outbreak, the ILO predicted. Around six million jobs were lost in the continent because of the pandemic during the first quarter.

Income losses for the informal economy will likely be severe as well, warned the ILO. Earnings for informal workers are expected to decline in the first month of the crisis by 60 per cent globally, the report said.

This expected decline could be the largest — at 81 per cent — in Africa and Latin America. This becomes a huge concern for Africa, since informal employment accounts for 85.8 per cent of all employment there.

"For millions of workers, no income means no food, no security and no future. As the pandemic and the jobs crisis evolve, the need to protect the most vulnerable becomes even more urgent," said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder. The cost in terms of income loss with no alternatives will lead to reverse migration from urban to rural areas, that could increase the spread of COVID-19 in rural areas.

This reverse migration may further add to the disease burden in the continent, where over 40 countries reported local transmission of the virus. COVID-19 infected more than 35,000 and killed over 1,500 people in 52 countries across the continent as of April 30, 2020, said the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

The ILO report, however, recommended some measures to help minimize social and economic impacts in the informal economy. It highlighted the urgency of policy actions for smaller businesses and workers in the informal economy.

The report reiterated urgency for international coordination on stimulus packages for effective and sustainable recoveries across the continent, as suggested by global leaders, including those from Africa.

It made a call for prioritising and scaling up successful programmes like cash transfer and programmes used for shelter and food relief. In many cases, conditional and unconditional cash transfers may also be needed for an extended period of time, according to the ILO.

MAY 2020

17.1 Australian government to discuss lifting COVID-19 restrictions on May 8

Source: newindianexpress.com,1 May,2020

Australia is currently on track to meet 11 of the 15 criteria for easing restrictions but urged Australians to continue downloading the government's COVID Safe tracing app.

Australia PM Scott Morrison

CANBERRA: The Australian government is set to discuss and review of the first phase of removing the baseline COVID-19 restrictions on May 8, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Friday.

The National Cabinet, which comprises the Prime Minister, state and territory leaders, was due to consider easing restrictions at a meeting later than that date, but Morrison said the meeting has been brought forward because of Australia's success in preventing the spread of COVID-19, reports Xinhua news agency.

"Australians have earned an early mark through the work that they have done," Morrison told reporters following a virtual National Cabinet meeting on Friday afternoon.

"That decision will now be made next Friday (May 8), and we'll be meet in lockdown g twice over the course of the next week to ensure that we work through the many things that have to be resolved in order to make those decisions."

Leaders attending Friday's virtual meeting were briefed by the Treasury on economic impact that restrictions were having on Australia's economy.

"We need to restart our economy, we need to restart our society," Morrison said.

He said that Australia is currently on track to meet 11 of the 15 criteria for easing restrictions but urged Australians to continue downloading the government's COVIDSafe tracing app.

More than 3.5 million people have downloaded the app since it was launched on Sunday evening but the health department has previously said that in order for it to be effective at least 10 million people should install it.

"There are currently over three and a half million downloads and registrations, of the COVIDSafe app, but there needs to be millions more. The coronavirus is still out there. Our numbers may be low but it's still out there."

So far, some restrictions were being lifted on a state-by-state basis rather than nationally.

Northern Territory (NT) Chief Minister Michael Gunner on Thursday revealed the plan to lift most restrictions in the NT, which has had only 27 confirmed cases of COVID-19, by June 5.

Steven Marshall, premier of South Australia (SA), on Thursday night followed by committing to a significant easing of restrictions within three weeks.

SA has had nine consecutive days without a new confirmed case of the virus and Marshall said that the state could return to normal life as early as May 21.

Brendan Murphy, Australia's chief medical officer, confirmed on Friday afternoon that more than 570,000 tests have been conducted nationally.

He said that health authorities will soon begin sample testing the public in an attempt to identify asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19.

As on Friday, there were 6,762 confirmed coronavirus cases in Australia, with 92 deaths.

17.2 Calls for inquiry as UK reports highest Covid-19 death toll in Europe

Source: theguardian.com,5 May,2020

Dominic Raab announced that the number of people killed by the coronavirus in the UK stands at 32,313 on Tuesday, the second highest death toll in the world

Britain has the worst coronavirus death toll in Europe, official figures showed on Tuesday, prompting calls for an inquiry into the handling of the pandemic.

The government's tally of fatalities across the UK reached 29,427 for those who tested positive for coronavirus, exceeding the 29,029 recorded in Italy – until now Europe's worst-hit country. Italy's total does not include suspected cases.

Newly released data from the Office for National Statistics showed that 29,648 deaths were registered in England and Wales with Covid-19 mentioned on the death certificate by 2 May. With the addition of the official death figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland, this was calculated to take the UK's toll to 32,313.

The true figure is likely to be significantly higher due to missed cases and a lag in reporting.

In the UK, 32,313 people have died after testing positive for coronavirus - in Italy, the death toll is 29,029
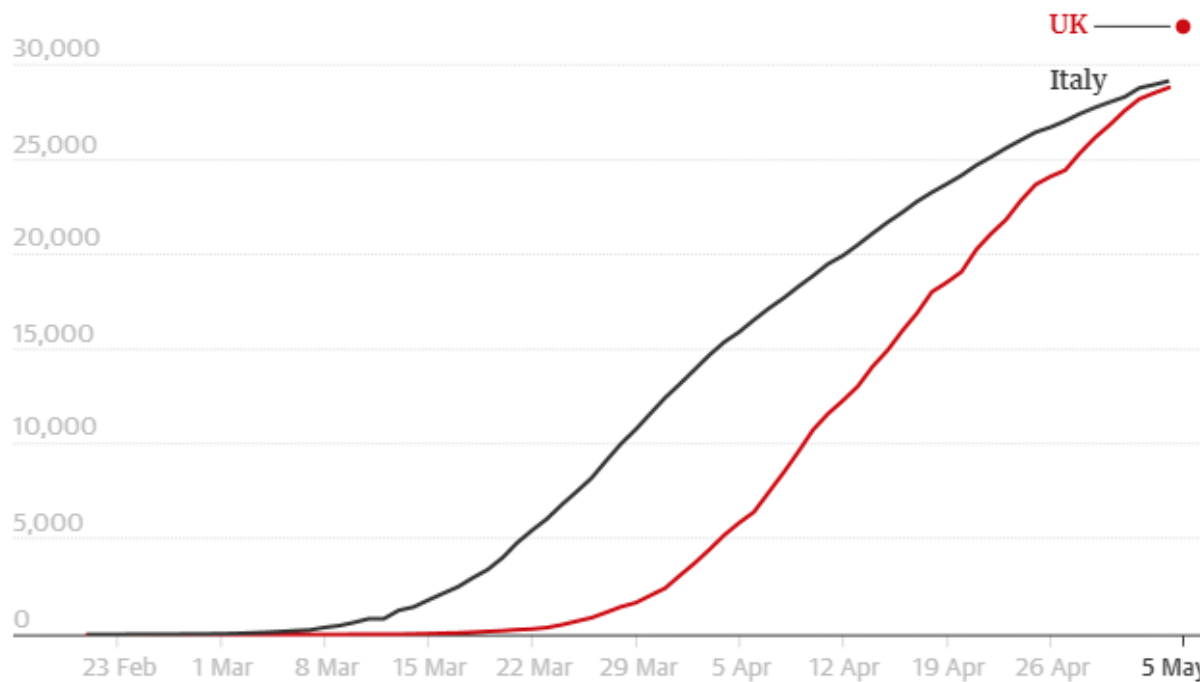
Guardian graphic. Source: Johns Hopkins CSSE (22 February to 4 May 2020) Note: The CSSE states that its numbers rely upon publicly available data from multiple sources, which do not always agree. *UK data for 5 May is taken from the ONS and Reuters calculations

While experts such as Prof David Spiegelhalter, chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge University and a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), have warned of the risks of comparing countries' death tolls, he said on Tuesday: "We are not doing very well and it's been another very bad week. I really don't like this league table of who's top and who's not, but there's no denying that these are really serious numbers."

Dr Claudia Paoloni, president of the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association trade union, said Britain having the highest number of deaths in Europe showed that ministers had "searching questions" to answer about their "inadequate" handling of the crisis, and called for a public inquiry.

"This is a very sobering and unwelcome milestone. It's of extreme concern that the UK now has the largest number of Covid deaths in Europe," she said. "There will have to be a full

investigation of the [government's] handling of the Covid response in due course – a public inquiry – to understand why we are experiencing such large numbers in comparison to the rest of Europe.

"It puts into question whether the government's tactics at the start of the pandemic were sufficiently fast, and especially whether the lockdown should have happened earlier and whether we should have been better prepared with increased capacity for viral testing and contact tracing from the start. Both have proven inadequate."

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, British Medical Association council chair, said the figures were extremely concerning "given that the UK was originally affected by the outbreak later than many other nations, and with the government initially saying that a death toll of 20,000 would be a 'good outcome'."

"It's too early to come to firm conclusions and we need to ensure that figures between nations are comparing like for like," he said. "However, there will in the future need to be serious scrutiny of the UK's response and questions asked about what measures were put in when, from imposition of lockdown to our approach to testing, and whether this may have contributed to the loss of more lives."

The shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, said: "Today's confirmation we have the highest official death rate in Europe is a tragic reminder of the severity of this horrific disease. The public will rightly ask why our death rate is so high."

Speaking at the daily Downing Street coronavirus briefing, the first secretary of state, Dominic Raab, repeated previous warnings by ministers and experts against making international comparisons, describing it as "speculation" to say the UK had the highest death toll in Europe.

"I don't think we'll get a real verdict on how well countries have done until the pandemic is over and particularly until we've got comprehensive international data on all cause of mortality," he said.

"We now publish data that includes all deaths in all settings and not all countries do that so I'm not sure that the international comparison works unless you reliably know that all countries are measuring in the same way."

Italy quickly became a centre of the coronavirus outbreak in Europe, with the first deaths coming in late February, and it was the first European country to move into lockdown.

The UK has the highest death toll in Europe from Covid-19
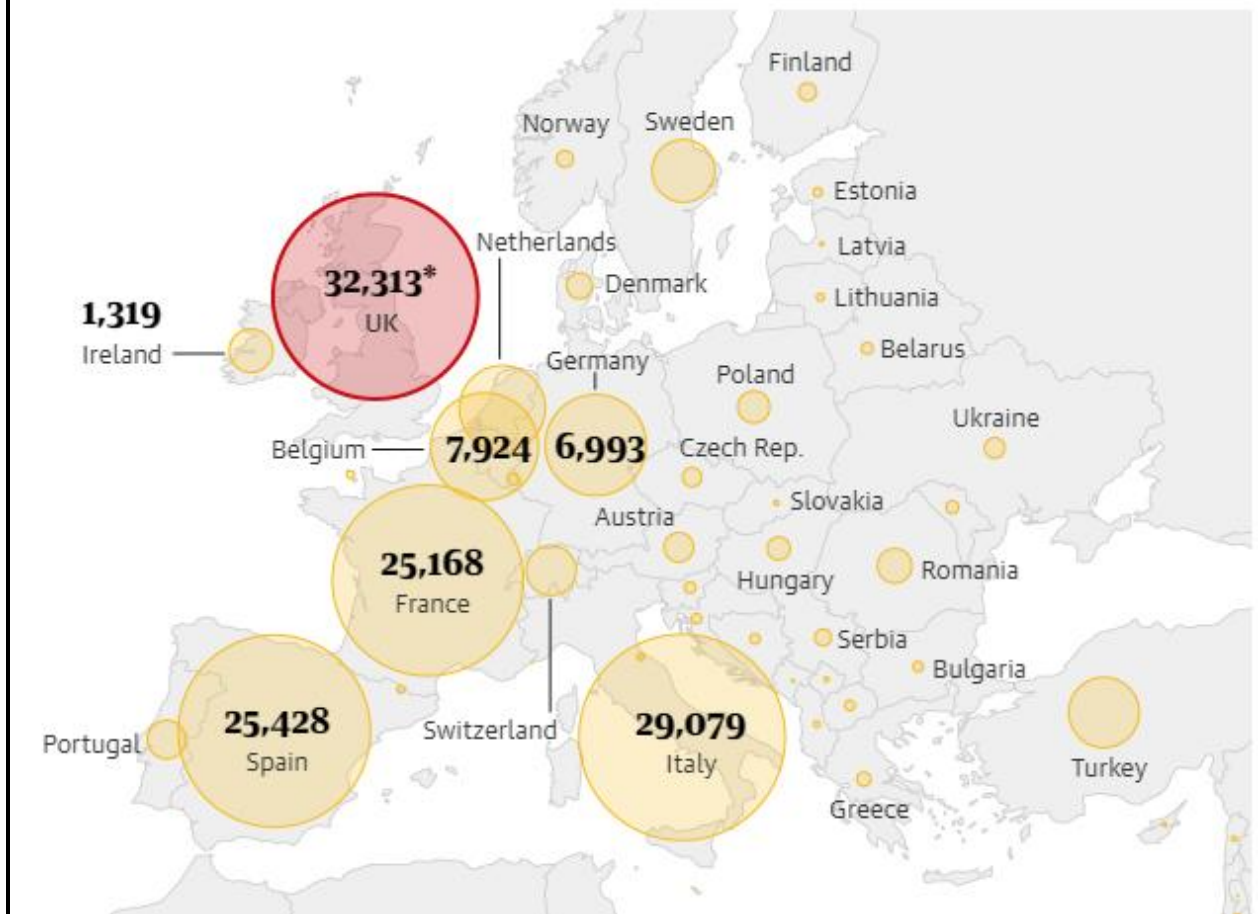
Guardian graphic. Source: Johns Hopkins CSSE (4 May 2020) Note: The CSSE states that its numbers rely upon publicly available data from multiple sources, which do not always agree. *UK data is for 5 May and is taken from the ONS and Reuters' calculations

As the death toll rose, so did the number of theories about what went wrong. Italy's large ageing population, culture of close social interactions and densely populated cities, as well as a lack of time to prepare and a slow initial response to the virus were among the reasons cited as why the country was so badly hit.

The UK, it was said, should learn from Italy. Now, it seems it could be at least as badly struck.

The latest ONS figures show that 21,997 people died from all causes in the week ending 24 April, which is 11,539 more than the average for that week.

That total was 354 fewer than the record level of 22,351 the week before, however. This was the first decrease in weekly deaths since the start of the outbreak and supports other figures showing that the UK is past the peak of coronavirus infections.

The increase in Covid-19 deaths only partly explains the unprecedented levels in total deaths. The reasons behind an extra 3,312 deaths in the week ending 24 April remain unclear, with speculation that they could have been caused by delayed hospital admissions for other life-threatening conditions and other factors such as economic hardship, and mental health problems.

Spiegelhalter said: "Well over 3,000 [of the excess deaths] weren't labelled as Covid. So nearly a third were from something else. There is a continuing anxiety that many of these are due to the lockdown itself.

"The one thing we do know is that the health service has been hugely disrupted, not just in terms of routine care, cancelled chemotherapies and radio therapies and elective surgeries, but also of people with symptoms not going to hospital."

Prof James Naismith, director of the Rosalind Franklin Institute at the University of Oxford, called for an urgent review into deaths caused indirectly by the virus. "We urgently need to identify the cause of these deaths. There are many plausible theories as to their cause, however, we need real data on this urgently," he said. "As we go forward, we want to minimise all deaths, not just those tagged as Covid-19."

The UK has seen 43.3 deaths per 100,000 people in the UK, compared with 48.1 in Italy

Belgium 69.4 per 100,000	
Spain 54.4	
Italy 48.1	
UK 43.3	
France 37.6	
Netherlands 29.6	
US 21.1	
Germany 8.4	
Iran 7.7	
Brazil 3.5	
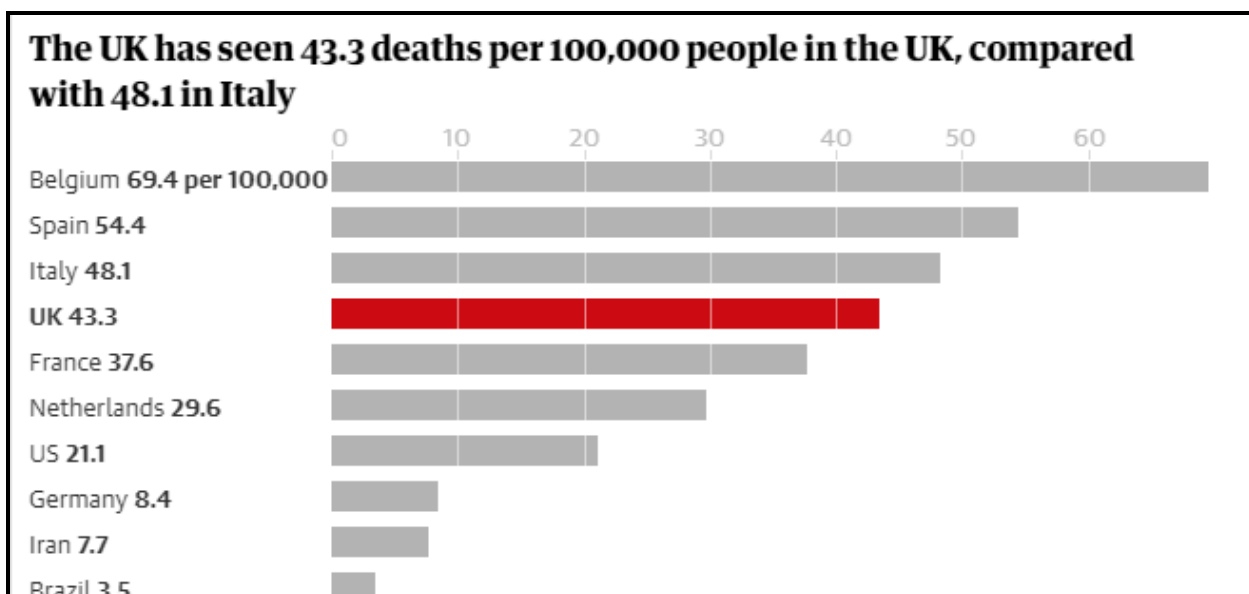
The latest figures also show that total care home deaths were 595 higher than the week before, at 7,911, whereas hospital deaths were 1,191 lower, at 8,243.

Of the coronavirus deaths registered up to 1 May in England and Wales, 6,686 took place in care homes, which was 22.5% of all the deaths from the virus at that point, the ONS figures show.

Provisional charts shared with journalists by Spiegelhalter showed coronavirus deaths in care homes now exceeding deaths in hospitals. He said: "I can be pretty confident that these [lines representing deaths in care homes and hospitals] have actually crossed a week or so ago with more Covid deaths happening out of hospital than in hospital." He added that it was too early to tell whether deaths in care homes had peaked.

For the first time last week, the government began including data on deaths outside hospitals in cases where people had tested positive for coronavirus, in the daily death toll figures for the virus. By contrast the ONS figures include all deaths where Covid-19 is mentioned on death certificates.

17.3 A study reveals that coronavirus had spread around the world by late 2019

Source: weforum.org,7 May,2020

- A new study suggests that COVID-19 spread around the world far quicker than originally predicted.

- French authorities have recently confirmed a case of coronavirus from December 27, almost a month before the country announced it's first official case.

- Over 3.7 million people globally have been infected by the virus.

A genetic study of samples from more than 7,500 people infected with COVID-19 suggests the new coronavirus spread quickly around the world after it emerged in China sometime between October and December last year, scientists say.

Scientists at University College London's Genetics Institute found almost 200 recurrent genetic mutations of the new coronavirus - SARS-CoV-2 - which the UCL researchers said showed how it is adapting to its human hosts as it spreads.

"Phylogenetic estimates support that the COVID-2 pandemic started sometime around Oct. 6, 2019 to Dec. 11, 2019, which corresponds to the time of the host jump into humans," the research team, co-led by Francois Balloux, wrote in a study published in the journal Infection, Genetics and Evolution.

The virus was spreading long before widespread testing was rolled out

Balloux said the analysis also found that the virus was and is mutating, as normally happens with viruses, and that a large proportion of the global genetic diversity of the virus causing COVID-19 was found in all of the hardest-hit countries.

That suggests SARS-CoV-2 was being transmitted extensively around the world from early on in the epidemic, he said.

"All viruses naturally mutate. Mutations in themselves are not a bad thing and there is nothing to suggest SARS-CoV-2 is mutating faster or slower than expected," he said. "So far, we cannot say whether SARS-CoV-2 is becoming more or less lethal and contagious."

In a second study also published on Wednesday, scientists at Britain's University of Glasgow who also analysed SARS-CoV-2 virus samples said their findings showed that previous work suggesting there were two different strains was inaccurate.

Just one virus type circulating

A preliminary study by Chinese scientists in March had suggested there may have been two strains of the new coronavirus causing infections there, with more of them more "aggressive" than the other.

But, publishing their analysis in the journal Virus Evolution, the Glasgow team said only one type of the virus was circulating.

More than 3.71 million people have been reported to be infected by the novel coronavirus globally and 258,186 have died, according to a Reuters tally.

Cases have been reported in more than 210 countries and territories since they were first identified in China in December 2019.

The genetic studies offer "fascinating" insights into the evolution of the virus, and emphasise that it is "a moving target with an unknown evolutionary destination", said Jonathan Stoye, head of the division of virology at Britain's Francis Crick Institute.

"All the evidence is entirely consistent with an origin towards the end of last year, and there's no reason to question that in any way," Stoye said.

A study by French scientists published earlier this week found a man in France was infected with COVID-19 as early as Dec. 27, nearly a month before authorities there confirmed the first cases.

The World Health Organization said the French case was "not surprising" and urged countries to investigate any other early suspicious cases.

Balloux's team screened the genomes of more than 7,500 viruses from infected patients around the world. Their results add to a growing body of evidence that SARS-CoV-2 viruses share a common ancestor from late 2019, suggesting this was when the virus jumped from a previous animal host into people.

The UCL researchers also found almost 200 small genetic changes, or mutations, in the coronavirus genomes they analysed - findings Balloux said offered helpful clues for researchers seeking to develop drugs and vaccines.

17.4 34 new Covid-19 cases reported in China, first in Wuhan in more than a month

Source: hindustantimes.com,10 May,2020

The total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in mainland China reached 82,901 as of May 9, while the total death toll from the virus stood at 4,633.

China has reported 14 new Covid-19 cases, including one from Wuhan in more than a month, where the outbreak was detected late last year.

This took taking the number of infections in the country to 82,901, health officials said on Sunday.

Police officers wearing protective face masks are seen in a Shanghai street as China tackles its outbreak Covid-19, on May 8

According to China's National Health Commission (NHC), 12 cases were domestically transmitted, with 11 reported from Jilin Province and one in Hubei Province, the first Covid-19 epicentre which has remained free from coronavirus infections for the last 35 days.

While China had officially designated all areas of the country as low-risk last Thursday, the new cases according to data published on Sunday represent a jump from the single case reported for the day before. The number was lifted by a cluster of 11 in Shulan city in northeastern Jilin province.

Jilin officials on Sunday raised the Shulan city risk level to high from medium. The 11 new cases made public on Sunday are family members of a woman who tested positive for Covid-19 on May 7 or people who came into contact with her or family members.

Also on Saturday, 20 new asymptomatic cases were reported. As of Saturday, 794 asymptomatic cases, including 48 from overseas, were still under medical observation, the NHC said.

The new Wuhan case, the first reported in the epicentre of China's outbreak since April 3, was previously asymptomatic, according to the health commission.

The total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in mainland China reached 82,901 as of May 9, while the total death toll from the virus stood at 4,633, according to the commission.

As of Saturday, Hubei had reported 68,129 confirmed Covid-19 cases in total, including 50,334 from its capital Wuhan where the first case was reported in December last year.

Globally, a total of 2,79,311 people have died and more than four million people have been infected by the coronavirus, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

17.5 Coronavirus World Update, May 11: Wuhan's new COVID-19 cluster, members of USA coronavirus taskforce in quarantine

Source: firstpost.com,11 May,2020

Over 4.2 million people in the world have tested positive for COVID-19 so far. Out of this, 284,674 have died and 1.5 million have recovered.

Over 4.2 million people in the world have tested positive for COVID-19 so far, as per Worldometer.com's data. Out of this, 284,674 have died and 1.5 million have recovered from the disease.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation reported last week that global tourism may drop by 60-80% in 2020 due to the pandemic. This would put the livelihood of millions at stake.

Russia becomes a COVID-19 hotbed

With constantly high daily-cases, Russia has now surpassed Italy and the UK and seems to be becoming the new epicentre of COVID-19 in Europe.

The country reported 11, 656 new cases and 94 deaths on May 11, bringing the total number of cases to 221,344 and the total number of deaths to 2,009. More than half of these cases are reportedly from Moscow.

Wuhan reported new coronavirus cluster, South Korea trying to contain Seoul cluster

After being opened for a month now, Wuhan, the original epicentre of the coronavirus disease, reported another COVID-19 cluster on Monday. The five patients who tested positive are reportedly from the same building compound and were previously classified as asymptomatic cases.

South Korea reported 34 new cases on Sunday and 35 on Monday, the highest this month. The surge in cases is being connected to nightclubs and bars after a single person (later tested positive for COVID-19) went to five nightclubs in Seoul in one night. As per media reports, about 1,500 people were present in all those nightclubs at the time. About 53 new cases have reportedly been connected to the outbreak. Seoul has closed nightclubs and bars to contain the outbreak.

Key members of US coronavirus taskforce in quarantine, Mike Pence will not self-isolate

Three members of the USA coronavirus taskforce are in quarantine right now after they came in contact with a COVID-19 positive person. These include US FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn, CDC director Robert Redfield and the physician and immunologist Anthony Fauci.

Fauci has already tested negative but may undergo multiple tests over the coming days.

Vice President Mike Pence's secretary Katie Miller also tested positive on Friday. However, as per media reports, the vice president will not self-quarantine and instead would keep working at the white house.

PM Borris Johnson's plans for lockdown changes

On Sunday, UK's Prime Minister Borris Johnson revealed his plans to gradually bring the UK out of the lockdown. He said that the country will have a 5-level alert system which will be run by a new Joint Biosecurity Centre in the UK. Level 1 would mean no disease in the country and level 5 would be a red flag. The PM further said that from Wednesday, people will be allowed to go out for exercise and sports (but only with household members).

Those who can't work from home will be allowed to work, schools will be opened by June and the hospitality industry may open by July if cases recede. Physical distancing rules would still be in place, chargeable by a fine if broken.

17.6 Global report: WHO says Covid-19 'may never go away' and warns of mental health crisis

Source: theguardian.com,14 May,2020

The World Health Organisation has warned that coronavirus "may never go away" as its experts predicted that a global mental health crisis caused by the pandemic was looming.

Medical workers get ready for a shift treating coronavirus patients in Moscow

The global health body on Wednesday cautioned against trying to predict how long coronavirus would keep circulating, and called for a "massive effort" to overcome it.

"It is important to put this on the table: this virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities, and this virus may never go away," said Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies chief.

"I think there are no promises in this and there are no dates. This disease may settle into a long problem, or it may not be," he said.

A report by the WHO's mental health department to the UN warned of another looming crisis: "The isolation, the fear, the uncertainty, the economic turmoil – they all cause or could cause psychological distress," said the department's director, Devora Kestel. She said the world could expect to see an upsurge in the severity of mental illness, including amongst children, young people and healthcare workers.

"The mental health and wellbeing of whole societies have been severely impacted by this crisis and are a priority to be addressed urgently," she said.

The statements came as Russia became the nation with the second highest number of infections at 242,271, behind the US with just under 1.4 million. The official death toll in Russia is 2,212, although authorities ascribed the deaths of more than 60% of coronavirus

patients in April to other causes. Moscow, the centre of the country's outbreak, accounted for 1,232 of those deaths. Tatyana Golikova, Russia's health minister, denied any falsification of the statistics.

In the US, president Donald Trump said warnings from his top infectious diseases expert on the dangers of lifting restrictions too soon were "not acceptable".

Trump said he was "surprised" by Anthony Fauci's caution on reopening the economy and schools too soon.

"To me it's not an acceptable answer, especially when it comes to schools," Trump said. "Our country has got to get back and it's got to get back as soon as possible, and I don't consider our country coming back if the schools are closed," he said, adding that the only thing that would be acceptable would be professors or teachers "over a certain age" not holding classes.

The apparently widening gap between the two men came on a day of more sobering economic warnings, with the head of the Federal Reserve, Jerome Powell, predicting of a "significantly worse" US recession than any downturn since the second world war, with record job losses and worse ahead.

"The path ahead is both highly uncertain and subject to significant downside risks," Powell said in a webcast speech. He also rejected Trump's suggested use of negative interest rates to aid recovery.

Meanwhile, the US Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin, cautioned that waiting too long to reopen the economy risked severe economic damage "and the health impact that that creates".

Global infections from the virus reached nearly 4.36 million, with deaths approaching 300,000.

In South Korea, 24,000 people have been tested in relation to the Seoul nightclub cluster, which prompted the closure of bars and entertainment venues in the capital, according to the city's mayor. Cases linked to the cluster have grown to 120.

Japan was expected to lift the state of emergency for 39 of its 47 prefectures on Thursday, local media reported, while the capital Tokyo is set to keep restrictions in place until it sees a convincing containment of the coronavirus.

While the nation has avoided the kind of explosive growth seen elsewhere, its testing has also been among the lowest, at 188 tests per 100,000 people, versus 3,159 in Italy and 3,044 in Germany. Hardest-hit Tokyo has conducted just 50,000 tests so far, of which about

5,000 were positive. With hospitals still stretched, the capital and surrounding prefectures are set to remain in a state of emergency.

Brazil has registered a record number of new cases of the novel coronavirus on Wednesday, surpassing France's tally to become the sixth-worst hit country, as the disease sends the economy toward its worst year since at least 1900.

The government confirmed 11,385 new cases in the last 24 hours, bringing its total count to 188,974 cases of the coronavirus since the outbreak began. Early on Wednesday, France revised its total number of confirmed and suspected cases down 0.3% to 177,700.

In other coronavirus developments:

- China reported three new cases of Covid-19, all locally acquired, and no new deaths or suspected cases.

- Stock markets in Asia reacted poorly to Powell and the WHO's comments and on a worries about a second wave of infections. Japan's Nikkei fell 07%, while indexes in Australia, Hong Kong, Korea and China all fell about 1%. But Australia reported an unemployment rate of 6.2%, which was lower than expected.

- Only 5% of Spain's population has been infected by the novel coronavirus, though that figure climbs to more than 10% in Madrid and areas in the centre of the country, according to a study released by the government on Wednesday.

- South Africa will further loosen a nationwide coronavirus lockdown later this month as the number of confirmed cases crept over 12,000, President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Wednesday. It came as Lesotho, which is landlocked by South Africa and was the last African country to have been unaffected, announced its first case of Covid-19.

- New Zealand's finance minister unveiled a NZ$50m fund to save jobs over the next four years.

- Hong Kong will screen hundreds of families, local media reported, after its 23-day run of no local infections was broken with the diagnosis of Covid-19 in a 66-year-old woman with no recent travel history, and her five-year-old granddaughter. Several other members of the family were reportedly also showing symptoms.

17.7 Coronavirus: Here's everything you need to know about the Moderna vaccine

Source: weforum.org,19 May,2020

- Eight participants were reported to produce antibodies to COVID-19, in a vaccine trial by Moderna Inc.

- The findings are 'significant' but further tests still need to be taken.

- If the vaccine is successful, the pharmaceutical company is hoping to supply millions of doses per month in 2020 and, with further investments, tens of millions a month in 2021.

Moderna Inc's experimental COVID-19 vaccine, the first to be tested in the United States, produced protective antibodies in a small group of healthy volunteers, according to very early data released by the biotech company on Monday.

The data comes from eight people who took part in a 45-subject safety trial that kicked off in March. The Moderna vaccine is one of more than 100 under development intended to protect against the novel coronavirus that has infected more than 4.7 million people globally and killed over 317,000.

Overall, the study showed the vaccine was safe and all study participants produced antibodies against the virus.

An analysis of the response in the eight individuals showed that those who received a 100 microgram dose and people who received a 25 microgram dose had levels of protective antibodies to fend of the virus that exceeded those found in the blood of people who recovered from COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus.

The news, issued in a release by the U.S. biotechnology company, lifted shares of Moderna by 20%.

Moderna launched a $1.34 billion share offering at an offer price of $76 per share late Monday. The company had earlier said it plans to sell $1.25 billion in common stock to raise money for vaccine development and manufacturing.

"These are significant findings but it is a Phase 1 clinical trial that only included eight people. It was designed for safety, not for efficacy," said Dr Amesh Adalja, in infectious

disease expert at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security who was not involved in the study.

The very early data offers a glimmer of hope for a vaccine among the most advanced in development.

Adalja said many glitches can occur between now and the time this vaccine is tested for efficacy in thousands of people. "What we do see is encouraging," he said.

Scientists are trying to understand what level of antibodies will ultimately prove protective against the novel coronavirus, and how long that protection will last.

Moderna said the vaccine appeared to show a dose response, meaning that people who the 100 mcg dose produced more antibodies than people who got the lower dose.

The vaccine has gotten the green light to start the second stage of human testing. Last week, U.S. regulators gave the vaccine "fast-track" status to speed up the regulatory review.

In the Phase II, or midstage, trial designed to further test effectiveness and find the optimal dose, Moderna said it will drop plans to test a 250 mcg dose and test a 50 mcg dose instead.

Reducing the dose required to produce immunity could help spare the amount of vaccine required in each shot, meaning the company could ultimately produce more of the vaccine.

Maximising numbers of doses

"In the context of a pandemic, we expect demand to far outstrip supply and the lower the dose the more people we expect to be able to protect," said Chief Medical Officer Tal Zak.

The U.S. government in April placed a big bet on Moderna, backing its vaccine with $483 million from the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The company said that grant will enable it to supply millions of doses per month in 2020 and, with further investments, tens of millions a month in 2021 if the vaccine proves successful.

"We are investing to scale up manufacturing so we can maximize the number of doses we can produce to help protect as many people as we can from SARS-CoV-2," Moderna Chief Executive Stéphane Bancel said, using the official name for the new virus.

In May, Moderna struck a 10-year strategic collaboration with Lonza Group that over time will allow the company to make up to 1 billion 50 mcg doses by the end of 2021, Zaks said in an interview.

If the vaccine is successful, the pharmaceutical company is hoping to supply millions of doses per month in 2020

The company is working out a plan to provide vaccine to countries outside of the United States, Zaks said.

"The U.S. is poised to be the first beneficiary of this vaccine," Zaks said, adding that the company believes it has an "ethical obligation to make this vaccine available to whoever needs it globally."

Moderna said it expects to start a larger late-stage, or Phase III, trial in July.

There are currently no approved treatments or vaccines for COVID-19, and experts predict a safe and effective vaccine could take 12 to 18 months from the start of development, which in Moderna's case was in January.

The most notable side effects reported from the early testing of Moderna's vaccine were three participants with "flu-like" symptoms following a second shot of the highest dose. The company said it believed the symptoms were an indirect measure of a strong immune response.

17.8 Just 7.3% of Stockholm had Covid-19 antibodies by end of April, study shows

Source: theguardian.com,21 May,2020

A portrait of Sweden's chief epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, hangs below a sign telling people to wash their hands at a restaurant in Stockholm

Just 7.3% of Stockholm's inhabitants had developed Covid-19 antibodies by the end of April, according to a study, raising concerns that the country's light-touch approach to the coronavirus may not be helping it build up broad immunity.

The research by Sweden's public health agency comes as Finland warned it would be risky to welcome Swedish tourists after figures suggested the country's death rate per capita was the highest in Europe over the seven days to 19 May.

Sweden's state epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, said the antibodies figure was "a bit lower than we'd thought", but added that it reflected the situation some weeks ago and he believed that by now "a little more than 20%" of the capital's population had probably contracted the virus.

However, the public health agency had previously said it expected about 25% to have been infected by 1 May and Tom Britton, a maths professor who helped develop its forecasting model, said the figure from the study was surprising.

"It means either the calculations made by the agency and myself are quite wrong, which is possible, but if that's the case it's surprising they are so wrong," he told the newspaper Dagens Nyheter. "Or more people have been infected than developed antibodies."

Björn Olsen, a professor of infectious medicine at Uppsala University, said herd immunity was a "dangerous and unrealistic" approach. "I think herd immunity is a long way off, if we ever reach it," he told Reuters after the release of the antibody findings.

Tegnell has denied herd immunity is a goal in itself, saying Sweden aims instead to slow the spread of the virus enough for health services to cope. But he has also said countries that imposed strict lockdowns could be more vulnerable to a second wave of infections because a smaller percentage of their populations would be immune.

In April, officials estimated one third of Stockholm residents would have contracted Covid-19 by early May, subsequently suggesting that the capital could reach herd immunity of between 40% and 60% by the middle of June.

Sweden: number of coronavirus deaths per day
Starting from day of first reported death

Data from Johns Hopkins University at 10:32 UTC 21 Dec 2020
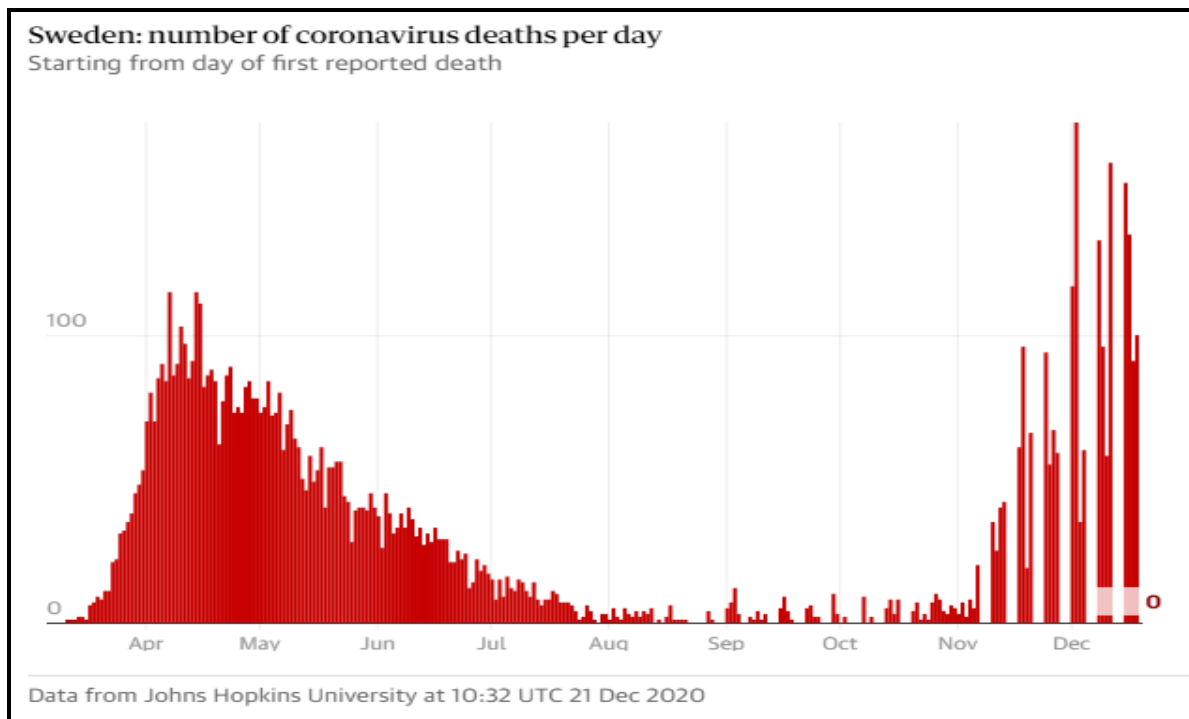
Relying on citizens to act responsibly, Sweden has closed schools for the over-16s and banned gatherings of more than 50, but asked – rather than ordered – people to avoid non-essential travel, to work from home and stay at home if they are elderly or ill. Shops, restaurants and gyms have remained open.

Polls show a large majority of Swedes support and are generally complying with their government's more relaxed, less coercive strategy, which stands in stark contrast to the strict mandatory lockdowns imposed by many EU countries.

Google records suggest trips to shops and cafes by residents of the Stockholm area are down 20%-40%, while passenger numbers on public transport have fallen by 30%-40%.

Sweden has had far more deaths related to Covid-19 per capita than its Nordic neighbours

Deaths per million population

Country	Deaths per million
Belgium	801
Spain	597
UK	538
Italy	535
France	420
Sweden	376
Germany	98
Denmark	96
Finland	55
Norway	44

Guardian graphic | Source: Johns Hopkins University. Note: counting methods vary by country
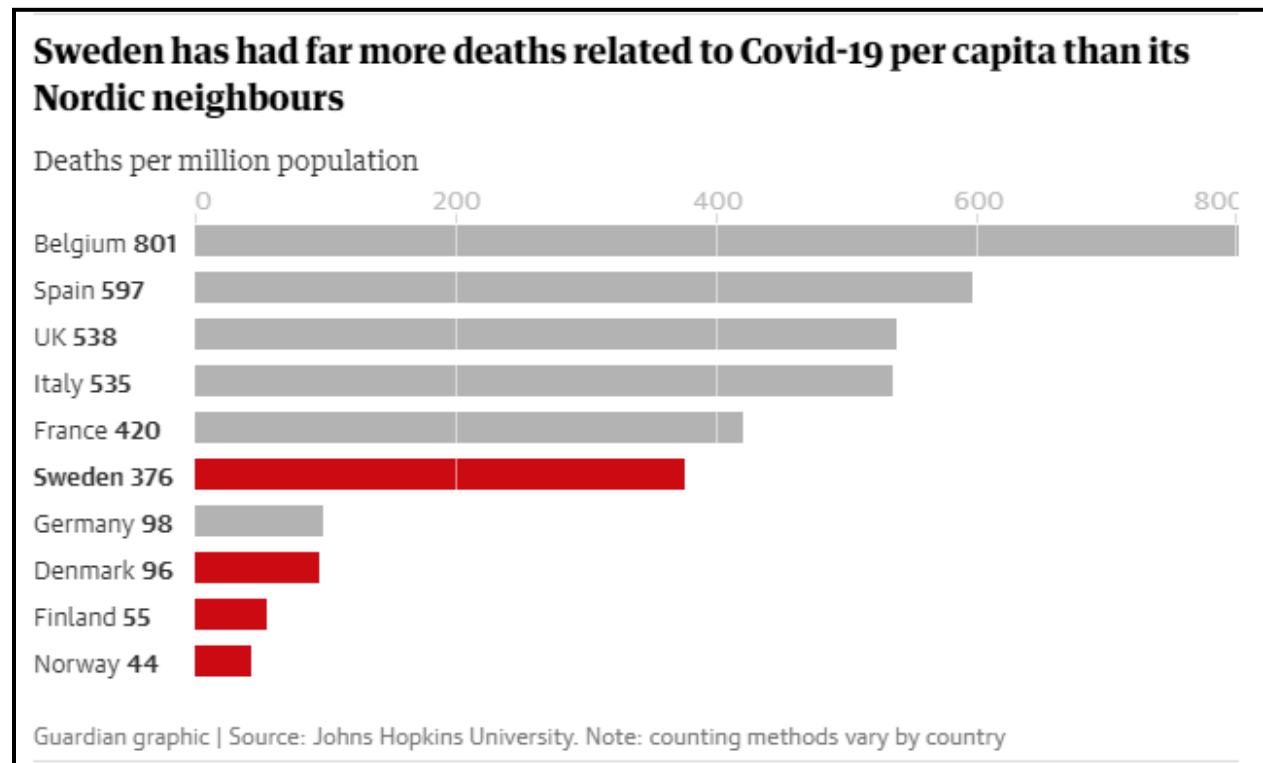
But the approach has been heavily criticised by some Swedish academics as the number of coronavirus deaths in the country has risen, far exceeding those of its Nordic neighbours.

While the overall coronavirus death rate per million is greater in Italy (535), Spain (597) or the UK (538), Sweden's (376) is far in advance of Norway's (44), Denmark's (96) and Finland's (55) – countries with similar welfare systems and demographics, but which imposed strict lockdowns.

According to the scientific online publication Ourworldindata.com, Covid-19 deaths in Sweden were the highest in Europe per capita in a rolling seven-day average between 12 and 19 May. The country's 6.25 deaths per million inhabitants a day was just above the UK's 5.75.

The government's decision to avoid a strict lockdown is thought unlikely to spare the Swedish economy. Although retail and entertainment spending has not collapsed quite as

dramatically as elsewhere, analysts say the country will probably not reap any long-term economic benefit.

The European commission has said it expects Sweden's gross domestic product to contract by more than 6% this year, on a par with much of the continent, while the country's central bank has estimated an even sharper fall of 7%-10%, with unemployment forecast to rise to as much as 10.4%.

The World Health Organization has warned against pinning hopes on herd immunity as a means of containing the coronavirus, saying last week that studies had found antibodies in only 1%-10% of the global population.

Critics such as Olsen say Sweden has done "too little, too late" and note that the government's laissez-faire approach has been catastrophic for older people, with roughly half the country's 3,831 deaths so far occurring in care homes.

Tegnell's predecessor as chief epidemiologist, Annika Linde, told Dagens Nyheter this week that the country's strategy towards care homes had been "completely insufficient. The problems were underestimated. It was a clear misjudgment."

The government has admitted serious failings in care homes and this month announced a big increase in funding for the sector, but remains adamant that the country's relatively high number of deaths per capita is not a consequence of its decision not to impose a lockdown.

In other coronavirus developments around the world:

- Media in Iran reported that more than 10,000 healthcare workers have been infected, as health officials in war-ravaged Yemen and Gaza expressed mounting concern about waves of new cases.

- China, where the virus originated, opened its biggest political event of the year, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, after months of delay.

- Another 2.4 million US workers filed for unemployment insurance last week, meaning close to 39 million people in the US have lost their jobs in just nine weeks.

- A quarter of US citizens have little or no interest in taking a coronavirus vaccine, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll, with 36% saying they would be less willing to take a vaccine if Donald Trump said it was safe.

- The pharmaceutical group AstraZeneca said it had capacity to produce 1bn doses of University of Oxford's potential Covid-19 vaccine and will begin supply in September if clinical trials are successful.

- Experts warned South Africa could have up to 50,000 Covid-19 deaths and as many as 3 million infections by the end of the year.

- The head of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) warned that the Tokyo Games would have to be scrapped if they were not held next year.

- The official number of coronavirus deaths in Russia reached 3,099.

- Afghanistan's health ministry said it had run out of hospital beds for Covid-19 patients in most parts of the war-torn country.

- Japan's prime minister said a state of emergency in Tokyo and its surrounding regions could end as early as next week.

17.9 Saudi Arabia to ease Covid-19 lockdown from May 28 with local travel, mass prayers

Source: hindustantimes.com,26 May,2020

Saudi Arabia, which gets most of its revenue from crude exports, announced a slew of austerity measures to cope with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the fallout from the collapse in oil prices, tripling value-added tax and cutting cost-of-living allowances for government workers.

Saudi Arabia plans to pare back its coronavirus lockdown restrictions this week as it seeks to revive an economy additionally hobbled by the collapse in oil prices.

The kingdom will begin a three-phase plan on May 28, state-run SPA reported Tuesday, citing the interior ministry.

By the third phase, due to begin by June 21, all restrictions will be lifted to allow a return to normal. Pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina, however, as well as international flights will remain suspended as the rest of the country opens up for mass prayers and domestic travel.

Saudi Arabia joins other Gulf neighbours in lifting restrictions. Dubai, a part of the United Arab Emirates, has shortened nightly curbs on movement and allowed businesses such as gyms and cinemas to reopen. Kuwait also announced it won't renew its 24-hour curfew.

Shoppers maintain social distancing while forming a long queue for access to a store in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday, May 19, 2020

Saudi Arabia, which gets most of its revenue from crude exports, announced a slew of austerity measures to cope with the impact of the pandemic and the fallout from the collapse in oil prices, tripling value-added tax and cutting cost-of-living allowances for government workers.

17.10 Cloth masks may prevent COVID-19 spread: Study

Source: indiatvnews.com,27 May,2020

Cloth masks, particularly those with several layers of cotton fabric, can block droplet and aerosol contamination of the environment, and may reduce transmission of COVID-19, according to a new research.

Cloth masks, particularly those with several layers of cotton fabric, can block droplet and aerosol contamination of the environment, and may reduce transmission of COVID-19, according to a new research. Scientists, including those from McMaster University in Canada, said most virus transmission occurs via larger particles in secretions like droplets, generated while speaking, coughing, or sneezing, and some are created when water evaporates from these droplets, turning them into aerosol-sized particles.

Cloth masks may prevent COVID-19 spread: Study

According to the review research, published in the journal Annals of Internal Medicine, every virus-laden particle retained in a mask is not available to hang in the air as an aerosol, or fall to a surface to be later picked up by touch.

Direct evidence about whether wearing a mask made of any material outside a health-care setting reduces transmission of COVID-19 is lacking, said study first author Catherine Clase from McMaster University.

She explained that the point of wearing masks is not that some particles can penetrate, but that every virus-laden particle retained in a mask is not available to hang in the air or fall to a surface to be later picked up by another person.

"Although no direct evidence indicates that cloth masks are effective in reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the evidence that they reduce contamination of air and surfaces is convincing and should suffice to inform policy decisions on their use in this pandemic pending further research," the researchers noted.

In the study, they examined a century of evidence including recent data, and found strong evidence showing that cloth masks can reduce contamination of air and surfaces.

Based on the review research, Clase said cloth masks can block even aerosol-sized particles.

She said a mask made of three layers (muslin-flannel-muslin) reduced surface contamination by 99 per cent, total airborne microorganisms by 99 percent, and bacteria recovered from aerosol-sized particles by 88 to 99 per cent.

The study noted that a commercial mask which is made of four-layer cotton muslin can reduce all particles by 99 per cent, compared with 96 per cent to 99 per cent for contemporary disposable medical masks.

Even for aerosols, Clase and her team believe that cloth masks are comparable with medical masks.

While the filtration of cloth is variable with single layers of scarf, sweatshirt and t-shirt keeping away particles in the 10 to 40 per cent range, the scientists said multiple layers increase efficiency.

Citing previous studies, the researchers said some combinations of cloth such as cotton-flannel, block more than 90 per cent of particles.

In terms of making masks, it is important to realise that more layers will give more protection, both inward and outward, but will make it harder to breathe, Clase said, adding that children under two and people with breathing difficulties may not find these masks comfortable.

She believes that more research is needed into the best materials and design of cloth masks, to help the many people who are sewing masks to protect people in their community.

"Given the severity of this pandemic and the difficulty of control, we suggest that the possible benefit of a modest reduction in transmission likely outweighs the possibility of harm," Clase said.

17.11 Latin America the new epicenter as pandemic causes international division

Source: ticotimes.net,31 May,2020

The famous Temple Mount in Jerusalem reopened its doors Sunday in another example of the slow return to normality in the world.

But that return is very distant for Latin America, the current epicenter of the pandemic, which exceeded 50,000 deaths from the coronavirus — almost 29,000 of them in Brazil.

More than six million people have been infected and 369,086 have died worldwide from COVID-19, a disease which has also caused deep international divisions on how to deal with the pandemic.
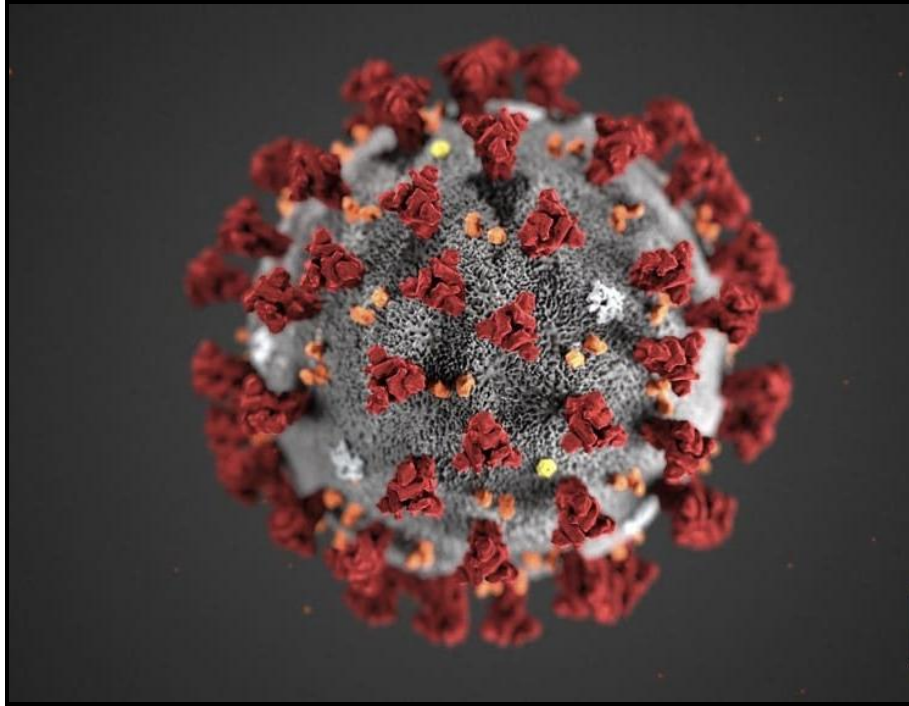
This was highlighted by the United States' announcement that it will end its relationship with the World Health Organization (WHO), accusing it of being too lenient with China, where the pandemic originated in December.

Difficult weeks are ahead for all of Latin America, where infections are approaching a million. Brazil, with 28,834 deaths, has become the the country with the fourth-most deaths from the coronavirus, behind the United States (103,472), Great Britain (38,161) and Italy (33,229).

The South American giant, where 210 million people live, also has the second-highest number of confirmed infections in the world at 498,444.

The situation in Brazil is further complicated by President Jair Bolsonaro's decision to oppose containment measures that have been decreed by several governors and mayors, who are following the recommendations of the WHO and the international scientific community.

Bolsonaro has even protested for the return of professional football in Brazil.

But Brazil is not the only hotspot in Latin America. The pandemic is also advancing with force in Mexico, with 9,779 deaths in a population of 120 million, and Peru, with 4,371 deaths in 33 million inhabitants and which Saturday exceeded 150,000 cases.

Reopening in Europe

The exit from isolation is most evident in Europe, which records almost half of the world's deaths from the coronavirus (177,595) and some two million reported cases, but where the pandemic now seems more under control.

Most European countries are steadfastly moving to phase out confinements, with a possible reopening of the EU's internal borders on June 15.

In France, parks and gardens reopened this weekend, and on Tuesday, bars and restaurants will be able to receive clients

The arrival of summer and the need to launch the area's vast tourism sector sets the pace.

Spain, for example, will begin to allow the arrival of German, French and Scandinavian tourists in the second half of June as part of a pilot project in the Balearic and Canary Islands.

Greece, another country where tourism has great weight, will authorize flights from the European Union from June 15. Visitors will not have to be quarantined, except for those who come from the regions most affected by COVID-19.

International division

The pandemic has exposed deep divisions in the international community and has led to geopolitical tensions.

The European Union on Saturday asked US President Donald Trump to "reconsider" his decision to withdraw from the WHO.

With 103,758 deaths and 1,769,776 cases, the United States is the most affected country in the world.

As a sign of his decision to use the full weight of the country on the international stage, Trump said on Saturday that he would postpone the G7 summit scheduled for June and that he would invite more nations.

"I don't feel that the G7 properly represents what's going on in the world. It's a very outdated group of countries," Trump said.

In addition, confinement measures have generated citizen unrest in countries such as the United States, Spain and Argentina, and pressure is growing on governments to restart vital sectors to cushion a historic economic crisis.

Almost a thousand people protested in Buenos Aires on Saturday against the mandatory quarantine in force since March 20.

Argentina, with 44 million inhabitants, on Saturday reported a record of daily contagions (795), and Sunday totaled 16,201 cases — including 530 deaths and 5,336 recovered.

In El Salvador, the Legislative Assembly approved an emergency law on Saturday to deal with COVID-19 and set the reopening of the economy for June 8, although President Nayib Bukele announced his opposition.

Central American governments, meanwhile, agreed to unblock borders and end a crisis unleashed by the restrictions imposed by Costa Rica on the transport of cargo.

Finally, the Ecuadorian government announced on Saturday that the Galapagos Islands will reopen their doors to tourism on July 1.

18.1 China reports one new COVID-19 case, four asymptomatic ones for June 3

Source: firstpost.com, 4 June,2020

SHANGHAI (Reuters) - China reported one new coronavirus case and four new asymptomatic COVID-19 cases for June 3, the health commission said on Thursday.

The National Health Commission said all five of the cases were imported, involving travellers from overseas. For June 2, China reported one confirmed case and 4 asymptomatic cases.

China does not count asymptomatic patients, those who are infected with the coronavirus but do not exhibit symptoms, as confirmed cases.

The total number of infections in China stands at 83,022. The death toll remained unchanged at 4,634.

This story has not been edited by Firstpost staff and is generated by auto-feed.

18.2 Global coronavirus deaths top 400,000 as outbreak grows in Brazil, India: Reuters tally

Source: reuters.com,7 June ,2020

A woman wearing a protective mask walks past a healthcare camp set up for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Dharavi, one of Asia's largest slums, Mumbai, India, June 7, 2020

Global deaths from the novel coronavirus topped 400,000 on Sunday, as case numbers surge in Brazil and India, according to a Reuters tally.

The United States is responsible for about one-quarter of all fatalities but deaths in South America are rapidly rising.

The number of deaths linked to COVID-19 in just five months is now equal to the number of people who die annually from malaria, one of the world's most deadly infectious diseases.

Global cases are approaching 7 million, with about 2 million, or 30%, of those cases in the United States. Latin America has the second-largest outbreak with over 15% of cases, according to Reuters tally.

The first COVID-19 death was reported on Jan. 10 in Wuhan, China but it was early April before the death toll passed 100,000, according to the Reuters tally of official reports from governments. It took 24 days to go from 300,000 to 400,000 deaths.

The United States has the highest death toll in the world at almost 110,000. Fatalities in Brazil are rising rapidly and the country may overtake the United Kingdom to have the second-largest number of deaths in the world.

The total number of deaths is believed to be higher than the officially reported 400,000 as many countries lack supplies to test all victims and some countries do not count deaths outside of a hospital.

18.3 New Zealand lifts all Covid restrictions, declaring the nation virus-free

Source: bbc.com,8 June,2020

New Zealand has lifted almost all of its coronavirus restrictions after reporting no active cases in the country.

At midnight local time (12:00 GMT), all of New Zealand moved to level one, the lowest of a four-tier alert system.

Under new rules, social distancing is not required and there are no limits on public gatherings, but borders remain closed to foreigners.

New Zealand has reported no new Covid-19 cases for more than two weeks.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told reporters she did "a little dance" when she was told the country no longer had any active virus cases.

"While we're in a safer, stronger position, there's still no easy path back to pre-Covid life, but the determination and focus we have had on our health response will now be vested in our economic rebuild," Ms Ardern said.

"While the job is not done, there is no denying this is a milestone. So can I finish with a very simple, 'Thank you, New Zealand'."

'A sustained effort'

New Zealand first went into lockdown on 25 March, setting up a new four-stage alert system and going in at level four, where most businesses were shut, schools closed and people told to stay at home.

After more than five weeks, it moved to level three in April, allowing takeaway food shops and some non-essential businesses to re-open. As the number of community cases continued to decline, the country moved into level two in mid-May.

The move to level one comes ahead of time - the government had originally planned to make the move on 22 June, but it was brought forward after no new cases were reported for 17 days.

Life has (almost) returned to normal in New Zealand

Under the new rules, all schools and workplaces can open. Weddings, funerals and public transport can resume without any restrictions. Social distancing is no longer required but will be encouraged.

The country's borders remain closed to foreign travellers, and rules remain in place requiring New Zealanders arriving from abroad to go through a 14-day period of isolation or quarantine.

Ms Ardern warned that the country would "certainly see cases again", adding that "elimination is not a point in time, it is a sustained effort".

New Zealand has recorded 1,154 confirmed cases and 22 deaths from Covid-19 since the virus arrived in late February, but has been widely praised for its handling of the crisis.

For many, the latest announcement is a cause for celebration - but not without caution. Auckland-based lorry driver Patrick Weston told the BBC: "Everyone is so happy we're finally through this, but we're still nervous.

"I think the main thing people are worried about is the economy - so many people out of work, so many people looking for work at the same time.

"[On Tuesday] all restrictions are lifted and we can carry on as normal. Sporting events, music events can all take place with no restriction of numbers. We're still being encouraged to social distance of course, so we hope people will be sensible.

"We're happy, but nervous about the future."

18.4 COVID-19 lockdowns around the world may have prevented 531 million new infections: Study

Source: firstpost.com,10 June,2020

With the very low levels of viral transmission seen in some countries, the pandemic would eventually die out in lockdown scenarios, the studies conclude.

Two new studies have pointed to the effectiveness of lockdowns around the world, claiming that proper implementation in some countries has reduced the transmission of coronavirus and controlled its rapid spread, saving millions of people from being infected in the still-raging global pandemic.

In the first study, published inNature on 8 June, researchers from the University of California, Berkeley report that shutdowns prevented or delayed an estimated 531 million coronavirus infections across six countries — China, South Korea, Iran, Italy, France and the United States.

A second study by scientists at Imperial College London estimates that shutdowns saved about 3.1 million lives across 11 European countries.

Indians sit inside a city bus in Ahmedabad, 10 June

Interventions to reduce the coronavirus ' spread in Europe have brought down infection rates down by an average of 81 percent compared to pre-intervention times, the Nature report claims.

In all the countries examined, the value for R naught — an estimate for how many people an infected person might transmit the virus to — was less than one. This means that each infected person passed the virus on to less than one person, on average. With the level of viral transmission as low as this, the pandemic would eventually die out in lockdown scenarios, the study concludes.

Back when the cases of COVID-19 first started to spike in early 2020, governments of countries like China, the United States, and Italy put measures in place – social distancing, shutting shops, schools, restaurants, and restricting travel. While the shutdowns disrupted economies globally and came with job losses and pay cuts, it was unclear how effective these measures really were at what they were meant to do: curb the virus' spread.

These control measures have worked," Alun Lloyd, a mathematical epidemiologist at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, who was not involved in either study, toldScienceNews. "(Lockdowns) have saved or delayed many infections and deaths."

That said, with countries now easing restrictions and moving to reopen the economy, residents of these very same countries could be looking at a new surge of positive cases, experts say.

An audience waits for the beginning of a performance of Berthold Brecht's 'Baal' during a public rehearsal of the Berliner Ensemble theater in Berlin, on 9 June 2020. The theater will start again on 11 July 2020, with public performances after the lockdown because of the coronavirus outbreak, but under safety restrictions and in the courtyard of the building.

"There is a very real risk if mobility goes back up there could be a second wave coming reasonably soon, in the next month or two," said Dr Samir Bhatt reportedly said at a news briefing on 8 June.

"We're very far from herd immunity," Dr Seth Flaxman, an epidemiologist at Imperial College London, added. "The risk of a second wave happening if all interventions and all precautions are abandoned is very real."

Herd immunity is a form of indirect protection from an infectious disease on the prowl, which takes effect when a large percentage of the population in a region or country has become immune to an infection – either via vaccination or previous infection/exposure to the infection. Therefore, it cuts the risk of transmission among the population at large, offering a degree of protection to individuals who are not immune to it.

So far, around 5 percent of the population in hard-hit places like Italy and Spain have been infected, according to the researchers. They estimate that around 70 percent of people would need to be immune to achieve herd immunity.

18.5 COVID-19 community transmission in 26 of 54 African countries: WHO

Source: downtoearth.org.in,12 June,2020

Several African countries have a poor healthcare system — about five hospital beds per 10,000 population.

About 115 days into the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Africa, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed community transmission in at least 26 of 54 countries in the continent.

The continent reported over 197,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 5,300 deaths as on June 9, 2020. It confirmed its first case in Egypt on February 14, 2020.

Community transmission "is evidenced by the inability to relate confirmed cases through chains of transmission for a large number of cases, or by increasing positive tests through sentinel samples (routine systematic testing of respiratory samples from established laboratories)," according to the WHO.

In West Africa, 12 of 15 countries reported community transmission, with Nigeria and Ghana being the most affected. A closer look at the outbreak in these two countries showed that over 47 per cent cases were reported from Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria. Accra, the capital of Ghana, accounted for over 64 per cent of confirmed cases in the country.

Community transmission was underway in at least five out of seven central African countries. These include Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea and Chad. Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Tanzania in Eastern Africa reported community outbreak of the virus.

Algeria and Tunisia in North Africa, and South Africa and Zambia in South African region, also reported community outbreak.

What does it mean for Africa

There is a bigger need for public health measures such as social distancing, wearing masks and washing hands, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) suggested.

The WHO recommended strengthening of primary hospitals and expanding capacities to deal with implications of widespread community spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2.

Most countries with reports of community outbreak, however, have poor health systems, according to WHO data. Nigeria, for example, has only five hospital beds and less than four doctors per 10,000 of the population.

In fact, most countries in this part of African continent except Ghana have less than five hospital beds per 10,000 population; Ghana has around nine beds, and Ethiopia only one. Less than two doctors are available per 10,000 of the population in Ghana.

More testing

With a population of about 1.2 billion, the continent conducted about 2.4 million tests as on June 4, 2020.

Laboratories need to gear up to deal with a rise in the number of specimens that will need to be tested for COVID-19, according to the WHO. Governments should anticipate the constraints of testing infrastructure and should prioritise to assure the highest public health impact of reducing transmission using available resources, it added.

The body also recommended that testing be prioritised since not all areas in a country may have community transmission. While prioritising testing for optimal utilisation of limited resources, the focus should be on early identification and protection of vulnerable patients and health care workers.

In areas with no community transmission, the objective should be to test all suspected cases in an effort to detect first cases in new areas or settings as rapidly as possible, and take immediate measures to prevent (further) spread in that region, the WHO suggested.

Results of testing of specific populations (patients requiring hospitalisation for respiratory diseases) can give a rough estimate of the size of the outbreak in the area and be used to monitor trends.

John Nkengasong, the head of Africa CDC, thereby asked countries to modify the way they test their population. He asked the governments to divert their attention on surveillance testing of those with flu-like symptoms instead of testing people arriving at airports.

Africa CDC has set a target of conducting at least 10 million tests in the next two-three months under the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT) announced on June 4, 2020 at the African Union Commission headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

"PACT is the game changer that will help capacitate Africa and enable it to build the strong partnerships needed to mobilise resources and support to defeat COVID-19," said Nkengasong. But even if the continent achieves this target, less than one per cent of the African population will be covered, he added.

Challenges remain

Kate Dooley of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, West Africa regional director, appreciated PACT for timely testing, tracing and treatment to reduce COVID-19 transmission.

But challenges remain. The continent needs to conduct 65.5 million tests. Even accounting for known supplies in the pipeline, there is a supply gap of 25 million tests to achieve this. Under such a scenario, rationing of tests is needed, said Dooley.

According to Tony Blair Institute, Africa CDC and African governments should source reliable antibody tests to complement limited PCR testing. These tests serve a different function but can also give peace of mind to health workers and provide governments with data to understand their COVID-19 outbreaks.

Community transmission in Africa in the unplanned cities is now an urban risk as well, with over half of the urban population living in slums. COVID-19 could travel faster in urban slums after community outbreak in the African cities as feared by UN-Habitat

18.6 COVID-19 fight: Spain opens its borders to Europeans on June 21

Source: newindianexpress.com,14 June,2020

Sánchez said Sunday that Spain and Portugal will keep their border closed to non-essential crossings until July 1.

MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez says Spain will open its borders to travelers from Europe's Schengen travel areas except Portugal on June 21, moving up the original date by 10 days.

Spain will drop its requirement for people arriving from abroad to stay in quarantine, either at home or in a hotel, for 14 days on arrival, when it reopens on that day.

Sánchez said Sunday that Spain and Portugal will keep their border closed to non-essential crossings until July 1.

Spain's government had already announced that on June 21 it will end the nation's state of emergency to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

From then on, Spaniards will be able to move freely around the country without restrictions, but face masks will remain obligatory in public transport and crowded spaces.

On Monday, Spain's Balearic Islands test their reopening strategy by accepting the first flights from Germany of tourists who will be exempt from a quarantine.

The islands plan to welcome up to 10,900 Germans during the trial.

Over 27,000 Spaniards have died in the country's pandemic.

18.7 Coronavirus Global Updates, 17 June: 'A welcome news but dexamethasone only be used under close clinical supervision,' WHO says

Source: indianexpress.com,17 June,2020

Global Coronavirus (COVID-19) Cases Updates: The number of coronavirus fatalities in the United States surpassed the number of American military casualties in World War 1. At least five US states are seeing a record rise in cases and hospitalisations as the country accelerates reopening.

Nurses tend to COVID-19 patients at the Shohadaye Tajrish Hospital in Tehran, Iran

Coronavirus Global Updates: Global cases of the novel coronavirus cases reached over 8.2 million on Wednesday, as infections surged in Brazil. The virus has so far claimed 444,563 lives as on today. The United States has by far the largest number of cases with 2,141,276 infections and 117,030 deaths.

Meanwhile, China's capital Beijing imposed restrictions in the city to contain the resurgent coronavirus cases by cancelling scores of flights, shutting schools and blocking off some neighbourhoods. In the past six days, Beijing has witnessed a resurgence of the disease, with some fearing the entire city is headed for a lockdown. Health officials reported 31 new

infections for June 16, taking cumulative cases since Thursday to 137 in the city's worst resurgence in four months, with 356,000 people tested since Sunday.

Britain on Wednesday authorised the state-funded National Health Service (NHS) to use steroid dexamethasone, the "world's first" coronavirus treatment proven to reduce the risk of death among severely ill patients, PTI reported. The cheap and widely used steroid has become the first drug shown to be able to save lives of terminally ill Covid-19 patients. Upon discovery, the scientists called it a "major breakthrough" in the pandemic, while the World Health Organisation hailed the research and announced to update its Covid-19 guidelines.

Kazakhstan's speaker of Parliament tests positive for Covid-19

The speaker of Kazakhstan's lower house of parliament Nurlan Nigmatulin ha self quarantined after he contracted coronavirus, authorities confirmed, Reuters said. The country raised an alarm as fresh surge in infections were witnessed in the capital Nur-Sultan. Last week, the speaker met Healthcare Minister Yelzhan Birtanov who then tested positive and is now in hospital being treated for pneumonia.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said the coronavirus situation was "challenging" because of widespread non-compliance with social distancing rules, but the government remained in control. "Tomorrow the government will announce measures to stabilise the epidemiological situation, including broader testing," he wrote on Twitter.

Honduran President, first lady test positive for Covid-19

Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández has tested positive for the novel coronavirus, his office said, news agency AP reported. In a statement issued by the presidency, it said, Hernández had followed recommended health precautions but "because of the nature of his work, it wasn't possible to remain in total isolation." He said his wife is asymptomatic and two other people who work with them are also infected.

His office said Hernández began to feel ill over the weekend and his viral infection was confirmed on Tuesday. The statement said he was being treated with microdacyn, azithromycin, ivermectin and zinc. Hernández said his symptoms are light and that he's already starting to feel better. He said he had started what he called the "MAIZ treatment," an experimental combination of microdacyn, azithromycin, ivermectin and zinc. Honduras has nearly 10,000 confirmed cases of the disease and 330 deaths.

Over 400 people test positive for virus in Germany's slaughterhouse

At least 475 people have tested positive for the coronavirus at Germany's biggest slaughterhouse Toennies inRheda-Wiedenbrueck, AP reported. A further 400 test results

were still pending. This massive spike in infections has pushed the number of cases in the region far above the government's threshold for emergency measures which is set at 50 new infections in a week per 100,000 inhabitants. Following the outbreak, authorities in the western German region of Guetersloh have ordered the closure of all schools and childcare centers. Regional daily Westfalen-Blatt reported that officials believe some of the cases were imported from other countries by migrant workers who took advantage of newly reopened European borders to visit their families.

Steroid Dexamethasone approved as COVID-19 treatment in UK

The UK government Wednesday authorised the state-funded National Health Service (NHS) to use steroid dexamethasone, the "world's first" coronavirus treatment proven to reduce the risk of death among severely ill patients, PTI reported.

The Department of Health said the cheap and widely available anti-inflammatory steroid has been immediately approved to treat all hospitalised COVID-19 patients requiring oxygen, including those on ventilators, after an Oxford University trial confirmed positive results on Tuesday. "The standard treatment for COVID-19 will include dexamethasone, helping save thousands of lives while we deal with this terrible virus," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

A pharmacist displays a box of Dexamethasone at the Erasme Hospital amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Brussels, Belgium, June 16, 2020

WHO moves to update Covid-19 guidance after dexamethasone clinical results

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said it was moving to update its Covid-19 guidelines on treating people to reflect results of a clinical trial that showed a cheap, common steroid can help save critically ill patients, Reuters reported. On Tuesday, trial results announced showed dexamethasone, used since the 1960s to reduce inflammation in diseases such as arthritis, cut death rates by around a third among the most severely ill COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital. Although the dexamethasone study's results are preliminary, the researchers behind the project said it suggests the drug should immediately become standard care in severely stricken patients. According to the preliminary findings shared with the WHO, mortality rate was reduced by about one third for patients on ventilator and for patients requiring only oxygen, mortality was cut by about one fifth.

German coronavirus tracing app downloaded 6.5 million times

In the last 24 hours, since its launch, Germany's smartphone app to help trace coronavirus infections has been downloaded 6.5 million times, the chief executive of software company SAP said, Reuters reported. The 'Corona-Warn-App' was made in six weeks by SAP and Deutsche Telekom. "It's a big success, it scales, it's user friendly and it helps society," Klein told journalists in a video briefing. Widespread take-up is needed, however, to increase the chance that both people in a risk event – spending 15 minutes within 2 metres of each other – use the app. In field tests, the app successfully recorded 80% of such encounters.

Timotheus Hoettges, Chief Executive Officer of Germany's telecommunications giant Deutsche Telekom AG, holds a mobile phone as he attends the presentation of the new contact-tracing smartphone app

Singapore scientists discover 5 antibodies to combat virus

A team of Singapore scientists has discovered five antibodies that can fight the coronavirus and protect against the key mutations that have emerged in the virus during the pandemic, the country's defence research and development organisation said, PTI reported. Human trials for the lead antibody, AOD01, will commence in the coming months, pending approval from the Health Sciences Authority, said the Defense Science Organisation (DSO) National Laboratories.

"They are all potent in blocking infection and effective against key mutations that have emerged in the virus during the pandemic," it said.

Essential workers have their noses swabbed before returning to the workforce at a regional screening center amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Singapore June 9, 2020

Record spike in coronavirus cases in US states

Fresh coronavirus cases hit a record high in Arizona, Florida, Oklahoma, Oregon and Texas on Tuesday showcasing a rising trend in new cases for the second consecutive week. As the states accelerate reopening the number of hospitalisations are also rising to record highs.

Following a new surge in Beijing, flights cancelled, schools closed

China's capital witnessed a slight increase in new coronavirus cases Wednesday as it fights a new outbreak after almost two months. Beijing has introduced a wave of new restrictions including cancelling over 60 commercial flights in and out of the city, especially from districts that are reporting cases.

Beijing's education commission ordered the closure of schools to stop the new surge in cases.

People wearing face masks to protect against the new coronavirus stop at a checkpoint outside the Xinfadi wholesale food market district in Beijing

Beijing reported 31 cases up from 27 the day before in an outbreak that has been primarily linked to a wholesale food market.

New Zealand PM assigns military to oversee border quarantine measures

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has assigned a top military leader to oversee the country's border quarantine measures after what she described as an unacceptable failure by health officials in allowing two women who returned from London to leave quarantine before they had been tested for the virus.

Jacinda Ardern speaks to media on June 17 after two new cases were reported

Before the two new cases, the country was declared as coronavirus free after not reporting any case for more than 3 weeks.

Dexamethasone drug offers some hope as cases surge

Researchers in the UK Tuesday announced the first evidence of a drug that can improve COVID-19 survival. The drug, dexamethasone, is a cheap and widely available steroid that reduced deaths by 35% in patients who needed treatment with breathing machines and by 20% in those only needing supplemental oxygen. However the drug did not appear to help people with less serious symptoms.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the drug was the biggest breakthrough yet in treating the coronavirus.

Meanwhile, Israel has signed an agreement with Moderna Inc for the future purchase of a potential coronavirus vaccine in case the company succeeds in its development.

Singapore to start human trials of vaccine in August

Singapore scientists testing a COVID-19 vaccine from US firm Arcturus Therapeutics plan to start human trials in August after showing a promising response in mice.

The vaccine being evaluated in Singapore works on relatively-untested Messenger RNA (mRNA) technology, which instructs human cells to make specific coronavirus proteins that produce an immune response.

18.8 Covid-19 was circulating in Italy in December 2019, says study

Source: hindustantimes.com,19 June ,2020

A study in May by French scientists found that a man was infected with Covid-19 as early as December 27, nearly a month before France confirmed its first cases

Scientists in Italy have found traces of the new coronavirus in wastewater collected from Milan and Turin in December 2019 - suggesting Covid-19 was already circulating in Northern Italy before China reported the first cases.

The Italian National Institute of Health looked at 40 sewage samples collected from wastewater treatment plants in northern Italy between October 2019 and February 2020. An analysis released late on Thursday said samples taken in Milan and Turin on December 18 showed the presence of the SARS-Cov-2 virus.

"This research may help us understand the beginning of virus circulation in Italy," Giuseppina La Rosa, an expert in environmental wastewater at the Italian National Institute of Health who co-led the research, said in a statement detailing the findings.

Small studies conducted by scientific teams in the Netherlands, France, Australia and elsewhere have found signs that the virus that causes Covid-19 can be detected in sewage, and many countries are beginning to use wastewater sampling to track the spread of the disease.

La Rosa said the detection of traces of the virus before the end of 2019 was consistent with evidence emerging in other countries that Covid-19 may have been circulating before China reported the first cases of a new disease on December 31.

A study in May by French scientists found that a man was infected with Covid-19 as early as December 27, nearly a month before France confirmed its first cases.

La Rosa said the presence of the virus in the Italian waste samples did not "automatically imply that the main transmission chains that led to the development of the epidemic in our country originated from these very first cases".

Samples positive for traces of the virus that causes Covid-19 were also found in sewage from Bologna, Milan and Turin in January and February 2020. Samples taken in October and November 2019 tested negative.

The institute said it plans to launch a pilot study in July to monitor wastewater at sites identified in tourist resorts.

18.9 Coronavirus: 'Very significant' resurgences in Europe alarm WHO

Source: bbc.com,25 June,2020

Europe has seen an increase in weekly cases of Covid-19 for the first time in months as restrictions are eased, the World Health Organization (WHO) says.

In 11 places, which include Armenia, Sweden, Moldova and North Macedonia, accelerated transmission has led to "very significant resurgence", said Regional Director Dr Hans Henri Kluge.

His warnings about the risk of resurgence had become reality, he said.

If left unchecked, he warned health systems would be "pushed to the brink".

More than 2.6 million cases of Covid-19 and 195,000 deaths have been reported in the WHO's European region, which is expansive, covering 54 countries and seven territories across Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Almost 20,000 new cases and more than 700 new deaths are being recorded daily.

"For weeks, I have spoken about the risk of resurgence as countries adjust measures," Dr Kluge told a virtual news conference on Thursday.

"In several countries across Europe, this risk has now become a reality - 30 countries have seen increases in new cumulative cases over the past two weeks.
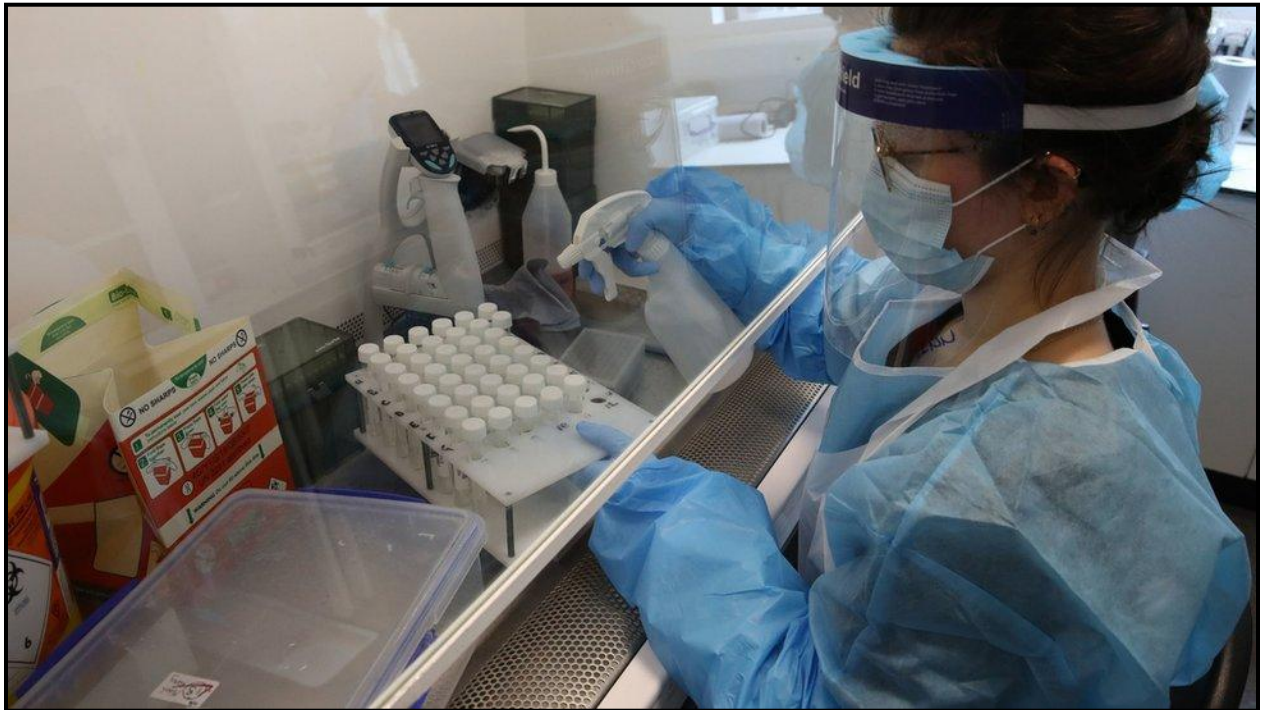
Close to 20,000 new cases are being recorded daily in the WHO's European region

"In 11 of these countries, accelerated transmission has led to very significant resurgence that if left unchecked will push health systems to the brink once again."

The 11 countries and territories were later identified by the WHO as Armenia, Sweden, Moldova, North Macedonia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Kosovo.

Dr Kluge said countries such as Poland, Germany, Spain and Israel had responded quickly to dangerous outbreaks associated with schools, coal mines, and food production settings, and brought them under control through rapid interventions.

Despite warning about resurgences, he said the WHO anticipated that the situation would calm down further in the majority of countries over the summer.

"But we have indeed to prepare for the fall, when Covid-19 may meet seasonal influenza, pneumonia, other diseases as well, because ultimately the virus is still actively circulating in our communities and there is no effective treatment, no effective vaccine, yet."

18.10 Coronavirus Global Cases Updates, 28 June: Russia reports 6,791 new cases; Sri Lanka lifts curfew completely

Source: indianexpress.com,28 June,2020

Global Coronavirus (COVID-19) Cases Updates: North America, Latin America and Europe each account for around 25 per cent of the cases, while Asia and the Middle East have reported around 11 per cent and 9 per cent of the total cases.

Workers wearing protective suits register people for coronavirus tests at a community health clinic in Beijing, Sunday, June 28, 2020

Coronavirus Global Updates: The confirmed number of coronavirus cases in the world surpassed 10 million on Sunday. A tally compiled by Johns Hopkins University registered the grim milestone on Sunday, after India and Russia added thousands of new cases. The United States has confirmed more than 2.5 million infections, the most in the world.

As many as 4,97,000 people have died due to the disease. Half of the reported infections are known to have recovered.

North America, Latin America and Europe each account for around 25 per cent of the cases, while Asia and the Middle East have reported around 11 per cent and 9 per cent of the total cases.

Pedestrians, some wearing protective face masks, walk through a street market in downtown Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Thursday, June 25, 2020

Russia has recorded 6,791 new cases in the past day. The national coronavirus task force said Sunday that the total number of cases rose to 634,437. It said 104 people died of the virus over the past day, bringing the total dead to 9.073.

Russia has the third-highest coronavirus infection case count in the world. But it has reported far fewer deaths than many countries with smaller infection case counts, leading to speculation that figures are manipulated which Russian officials vehemently deny.

UK death toll from confirmed cases up 36 to 43,550

Britain's death toll from confirmed cases of the new coronavirus has risen to 43,550, an increase of 36 from a day earlier, government figures showed on Sunday.

The southern German state of Bavaria says it's starting a program to offer coronavirus testing for all residents. State Health Minister Melanie Huml said Sunday that the corona test offensive will help provide Bavarians clarity if they have been infected. Bavaria is Germany's largest state by area and is home to some 13 million people. It has been the worst hit by the coronavirus both in terms of infections per capita and in total numbers.

As of Sunday, the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's disease control center, reported the state had 48,294 of Germany's overall 193,499 cases, with 2,592 of its 8,957 deaths. Bavaria is the first of Germany's 16 states to undertake universal testing. The state plans to pay for tests that aren't already covered under the country's health care system.

Sri Lanka lifts coronavirus curfew

The Sri Lankan government on Sunday completely lifted a curfew imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus after no new case of community infection was recorded for nearly two months in the country. Sri Lanka has been under a continuous lockdown since March 20, a week after the first local victim of the pandemic was reported. Initially, a nationwide blanket curfew was imposed but it was later eased for about two-thirds of the country and was mostly confined to night time.

The government had ordered partial opening of offices and businesses mid-May. From early June, the restrictions were further relaxed with public transport being allowed. The government further relaxed the COVID-19 curfew, which was in force from 11 pm to 4 am, to only four hours from midnight to 4 am daily from June 14 onwards. "The curfew has completely been lifted effective from today, June 28 Sunday," President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office said in a statement.

According to health authorities, no community coronavirus case was reported in the country since April 30 and no death due to the disease was reported since June 1. Lanka has so far recorded only 2,033 coronavirus cases and 11 fatalities.

UK plans localised lockdowns as deaths among Indian-origin people remain high

The UK government on Sunday said it is planning to impose localised lockdowns in some regions showing a spike in coronavirus infections, as latest figures showed that Indian-origin people remain in the category of those hardest hit from the deadly virus among Britain's ethnic minorities.

Home Secretary Priti Patel confirmed as "correct" the reports of the first such local lockdown for Leicester, a region in eastern England with a large Indian-origin population. "We have seen flare-ups across the country already, just in the last three or four weeks in particular. There will be support going into Leicester," said Patel.

Coronavirus spreads to all 77 districts of Nepal

The coronavirus infection has spread to all the 77 districts in Nepal with the detection of 463 new COVID-19 cases in the country, the health ministry said on Sunday. The deadly virus has so far claimed 28 lives in Nepal, health ministry spokesperson Jageshwar Gautam said at his daily press briefing.

With the detection of 463 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, the total tally now stands at 12,772, he said. The coronavirus has now spread to all the 77 districts in the country, the ministry said. As many as 179 coronavirus patients, including 13 women, were discharged from hospitals, taking the total number of recoveries to 3,013.

Italy honours its virus dead with Bergamo concert

Italy is honouring its coronavirus dead with a Requiem concert performed in front of the cemetery in Bergamo, one of the hardest-hit provinces in the onetime epicentre of the European outbreak. President Sergio Mattarella, the 243 mayors of cities in Bergamo province and a representative of families who lost loved ones have been invited to attend the evening concert, which is being transmitted live on RAI state television.

It will feature the Requiem Mass composed by Bergamo native Gaetano Donizetti, one of Italy's most important 19th century composers.

Singapore reports 213 new COVID-19 cases

Singapore authorities have asked the people to adhere to social distancing and other coronavrius prevention norms after the island nation reported 213 new cases on Sunday. Of the new cases, 202 are foreign workers residing in packed dormitories, which have accounted for most of Singapore's virus cases. The government has intensified testing in these quarters.

The rest of the 11 new cases were reported from community zones, including five Singapore citizens or permanent residents (foreigners) and six foreigners on work passes, said the Ministry of Health (MOH). Now, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Singapore stands at 43,459.

India reported over 19,000 cases of coronavirus and 410 deaths on Saturday, bringing the total number of cases to 5,28,859, with 16,095 deaths so far. Follow Coronavirus India LIVE Updates

While active infections stand at 2,03,051, there are 3,09,713 patients who have already recovered. The last one lakh cases have been added in less than a week. Amid the surge, several states have reimposed full or partial lockdown.

62 new cases in South Korea

South Korea confirmed 62 new cases of coronavirus in the last 24 hours, the Associated Press reported. The total number of cases in the country now stands at 12,715 with 282 deaths.

The Korea Centre for Disease Control and Prevention said 11,364 of them have recovered while 1,069 are in quarantine for Covid-19 treatment. Out of the new cases, 40 were domestically infected while the rest 22 came from overseas. It said 26 of the domestic cases were detected in Seoul metropolitan area, which is densely populated.

China reports 17 new cases of coronavirus

China reported 17 new confirmed cases of Covid-19, with all but three from domestic transmission in Beijing. No new deaths were reported on Sunday. The country has reported 83,500 cases and 4,634 deaths so far.

Many people traveled during the three-day Dragon Boat Festival ended on Saturday, but anti-crowding measures were in force nationwide.

Brazil coronavirus cases cross 1.3 million

Brazil recorded 38,693 new cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours and 1,109 deaths, the Health Ministry said on Saturday. The country has reported around 13,13,667 cases of coronavirus, with about 57,070 fatalities so far.

Rural areas in United States reporting rise in cases

The United States is experiencing a second wave of coronavirus infections, with states states like Texas and Florida reporting thousands of new cases every day, the Associated Press reported. Some places that appeared to have avoided the worst are seeing surges in infections.

Many rural counties in states including California, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Texas and Florida have seen cases rise to more than double in a week, as per data from the John Hopkins University (JHU).

In Kansas, where livestock outnumber people, reported cases have more than doubled in recent weeks. On June 5, the seven-day average for daily new cases was around 96, by Friday, it went up to 211. Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas ordered employees and business patrons to wear masks, when 6 feet of separation isn't possible.

The daily number of confirmed cases rose to 45,300 from the previous day's record of 40,000, as per JHU. Daily deaths have come down to around 600 from a peak of 2,200 in mid-April.

The United State accounts for the highest number of coronavirus cases in the world, with as many as 2.5 million cases and about 1,25,000 deaths.

Angela Merkel cautions: Coronavirus pandemic is far from over

German Chancellor Angela Merkel Saturday cautioned that the coronavirus pandemic is far from over. German authorities renewed a lockdown in a region of about 5,00,000 people in the past week after 1,300 slaughterhouse workers tested positive for Covid-19. "It's easy to forget because Germany has gotten through the crisis well so far, but that doesn't mean we are protected, that the risk has been averted; that is not the case, as is demonstrated by these regional outbreaks.

Victoria steps up efforts to contain Covid-19

Victoria state in Australia stepped up efforts to contain a rise in Covid-19 cases by ordering mandatory testing of all travelers returning from overseas. The state government said travelers in mandatory quarantine will be tested twice, on the third and the eleventh days of their 14-day isolation.

As many as 49 new cases were reported on Sunday. New South Wales, the most populous state in Australia reported three new cases while Western Australia reported one case.

JULY 2020

19.1 Moderna phase 3 Covid-19 vaccine trial could still begin in July

Source: economictimes.indiatimes.com,3 July,2020

SAN FRANCISCO: US-based pharmaceutical major Moderna has said that it still expects to begin phase-3 clinical trial of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate in July after a report said that the late stage trial of the vaccine involving 30,000 participants got delayed due to changes in the study plan.

The trial was earlier scheduled to begin on July 9, according to investigators at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Citing unnamed investigators, healthcare publication STAT News on Thursday reported that the trial has been delayed.

Moderna in a statement said that it still hopes to begin the trial in July.

"Moderna has previously disclosed that the Phase 3 trial of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate mRNA-1273 is expected to begin in July. The trial is still expected to begin in July and we expect to be the first to start a Phase 3 trial," the company said.

"We have worked closely with NIH/OWS (US National Institutes of Health / Office of Workplace Solutions) to align on the final protocol in order to begin the trial on time."

The Moderna vaccine candidate is an RNA-based vaccine designed to help the body produce antibodies that protect against Covid-19.

The World Health Organization (WHO) late last month said that the UK-based AstraZeneca is leading the race to develop an effective vaccine against Covid-19, while Moderan is not far behind.

19.2 COVID-19 vaccine: Completion of trials could take at least 6 to 9 months, says Soumya Swaminathan

Source: thehindu.com,5 July,2020

It is encouraging to see that at least seven Indian companies are developing COVID-19 vaccines. All of them must be tested ... and till we see results from these trials, we cannot predict which of them will be successful, says the Chief Scientist at WHO

World Health Organization (WHO) Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan

A day after scientists and experts raised serious concerns over Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) letter to all 12 principal investigators to speed up the trial process of Bharat Biotech's COVID-19 vaccine and enable it to be launched for "public health use latest by August 15", the nodal agency issued a clarification saying the letter was meant only to "cut unnecessary red tape" and "speed up recruitment of participants". Experts around the world have been saying that it would take at least 12-18 months to launch a vaccine for COVID-19.

In an email to The Hindu, Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization, said: "A realistic (but very optimistic) timeline from the start of Phase-1 to the completion of Phase-3 could be about six to nine months (if all goes exactly according to plan)."

Bharat Biotech has got an approval to conduct only Phase-1 and Phase-2 trials. So launching the vaccine for public use before August 15 this year would mean that the Phase-3 trial, which tests the safety and efficacy of the vaccine on a large number of participants and takes the longest time to complete, may have to be skipped or rushed up.

Responding to a specific question whether Phase-3 trial can be skipped for making the vaccine available for public use in light of the pandemic, Dr. Swaminathan said: "Any vaccine must demonstrate efficacy and safety in a sizable number of participants. The WHO has published target product profiles for a COVID vaccine [and] immunogenicity data alone

would be insufficient for a vaccine use policy. It is possible to have protocols which flow seamlessly from Phase-2 to Phase-3 based on interim analysis of data."

ACT accelerator

In the midst of the pandemic and in the absence of any safe and efficacious vaccine, attempts are being made to accelerate vaccine development.

On whether vaccine development can be rushed through by bypassing certain critical stages of testing, she said: "The pandemic demands unprecedented efforts to develop a vaccine. That is why the WHO and partners launched the ACT [Access to COVID-19 Tools] accelerator to accelerate the development, deployment and delivery of COVID vaccines. While clinical trials need to be performed with scientific rigour and demonstrate efficacy and safety, timelines can be shortened by investing in manufacturing upfront, preparing sites in advance, regulatory harmonisation, collaboration between the different government agencies and anticipating the next steps. Performing trials in areas and among groups with a high risk of infection will also help by accumulating the necessary endpoints in a shorter time."
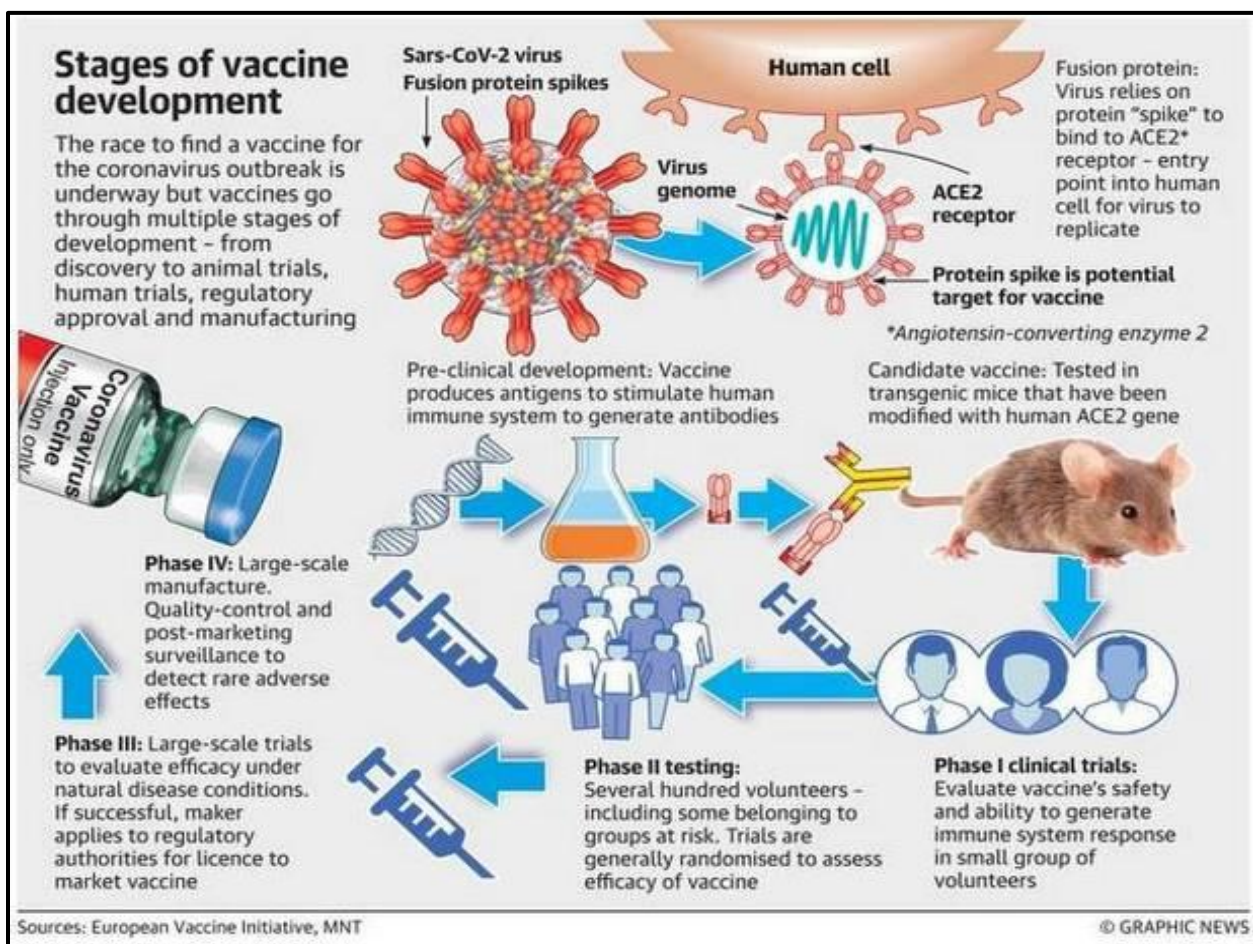
China has recently approved the use of one of its COVID-19 vaccines, which has completed Phase-1 and Phase-2 trials, to be used exclusively by the military for one year. The vaccine is not currently being made available for public use. Reiterating the need to conduct a Phase-3 trial before launching the vaccine for public use, Dr. Swaminathan told The Hindu: "Any vaccine that is going to be used at large scale must demonstrate efficacy and safety. The WHO has offered our support to vaccine developers all over the world to enable that the best science is performed, and to facilitate multi-country clinical trials."

'Important to start preparing for vaccine delivery'

"The scientific establishment in India has a long history of rising to national challenges and delivering the needed products. Indian manufacturers supply over half of childhood vaccines procured by the UNICEF and the GAVI. I am optimistic that with the capacity available in the public and private sector in India, that one or more successful vaccines will emerge," she said.

She also added that the WHO, along with the GAVI and the CEPI, is in dialogue with Secretary, DBT, and five Indian vaccine manufacturers to provide any kind of support and facilitate advancing the candidates to trials.

Dr. Swaminathan added: "It is encouraging to see that at least seven Indian companies are developing COVID-19 vaccines. All of them must be tested, through the various phases, in collaboration with the DBT and the ICMR, and till we see results from these trials, we cannot predict which of them will be successful. Having a regulatory standard and clear criteria for advancing vaccines through the various stages, will be very helpful (the FDA has recently produced such a document, and so has the WHO). At the same time, it is important to start preparing for vaccine delivery and preparing the strategy and policy for deployment among various risk groups. Community engagement and preparedness will be an important component and must be addressed."

19.3 How Sweden's bold 'herd immunity approach' on COVID-19 failed

Source: theweek.in,8 July,2020

Sweden, the Scandinavian nation, under the leadership of Prime Minister Stefan Lofven never imposed a lockdown like many other nations across the world did at the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak. However, Sweden's different approach of herd immunity did not exactly work in the nation's favour. In the nation with a population of 1.02 crore, the virus has so far claimed more than 5,420 lives.

This may seem like a low number in comparison with a number like 130,000 fatalities in the US, but given the population of the country, the total number of cases per million of population in Sweden amounts to 40 per cent more than those in the US and 12 times more than in Norway, seven times more than Finland and six times more than Denmark, The New York Times reported.

The Swedish government was taking the approach of herd immunity to tackle the pandemic. Herd immunity, according to Healthline, can happen in two ways: 1. Many people contract the disease and in time build up an immune response to it naturally. 2. Many people are vaccinated against the disease to achieve immunity. Sweden had allowed large gatherings to form, schools to remain open, restaurants to remain open till late and resorts to welcome guests.

This captured international attention to the effect that US President Donald Trump on April 30 tweeted, "Despite reports to the contrary, Sweden is paying heavily for its decision not to lockdown. As of today, 2,462 people have died there, a much higher number than the neighbouring countries of Norway (207), Finland (206) or Denmark (443). The United States made the correct decision!"

The decision taken by Sweden has gained international attention and thanks to the death toll, has become a cautionary tale. Sweden's economy might have fared slightly better than the other neighbouring nations that went under lockdown but, putting the stock on people's sensibility to avoid large gatherings has resulted in 73,334 people contracting the

disease. Sweden's central bank expects its economy to contract by 4.5 per cent this year, a revision from a previously expected gain of 1.3 per cent. This is more or less similar to how the damage caused by the pandemic has played out in Denmark, where the central bank expects that the economy will shrink 4.1 per cent this year.

19.4 Indoor airborne spread of COVID-19 possible: WHO changes its corona stance

Source:newindianexpress.com,10 July,2020

WHO has long dismissed the possibility that the coronavirus is spread in the air except for certain risky medical procedures, such as when patients are first put on breathing machines.

A street vendor sells new coronavirus puppets in La Paz, Bolivia, Thursday, July 9, 2020

LONDON: The World Health Organisation is acknowledging the possibility that COVID-19 might be spread in the air under certain conditions, after more than 200 scientists urged the agency to do so.

In an open letter published this week in a journal, two scientists from Australia and the US wrote that studies have shown "beyond any reasonable doubt that viruses are released during exhalation, talking and coughing in microdroplets small enough to remain aloft in the air."

The researchers, along with more than 200 others, appealed for national and international authorities, including WHO, to adopt more stringent protective measures.

WHO has long dismissed the possibility that the coronavirus is spread in the air except for certain risky medical procedures, such as when patients are first put on breathing machines.

In a change to its previous thinking, WHO noted on Thursday that studies evaluating COVID-19 outbreaks in restaurants, choir practices and fitness classes suggested the virus might have been spread in the air.

Airborne spread "particularly in specific indoor locations, such as crowded and inadequately ventilated spaces over a prolonged period of time with infected persons cannot be ruled out," WHO said.

Still, officials also pointed out that other modes of transmission, like contaminated surfaces or close contacts between people in such indoor environments, might also have explained the disease's spread.

WHO's stance also recognised the importance of people spreading COVID-19 without symptoms, a phenomenon the organisation has long downplayed.

WHO has repeatedly said such transmission is "rare" despite a growing consensus among scientists globally that asymptomatic spread likely accounts for a significant amount of transmission.

The agency said that most spread is via droplets from infected people who cough or sneeze, but added that people without symptoms are also capable of transmitting the disease.

"The extent of truly asymptomatic infection in the community remains unknown," WHO said.

19.5 Russian Scientists Successfully Complete World's First COVID-19 Vaccine Trial

Source:republicworld.com,12 July,2020

Sechenov University has successfully completed clinical trials of the world's first COVID-19 vaccine; first group of volunteers would be discharged on July 15

Sechenov University researchers have successfully completed clinical trials of the world's first COVID-19 vaccine on volunteers, chief researcher Elena Smolyarchuk told a Russian news outlet on Sunday, July 12.

The Russian mission to India, in a tweet, quoted Smolyarchuk saying 'the vaccine is safe'. Alexander Lukashev, Director of the Institute of Medical Parasitology Tropical and Vector-Borne Diseases at Sechenov University, also vouched for the safety of the drug while speaking to local media.

As per reports, the first group of volunteers would be discharged on July 15 and the second batch would be discharged on July 20. Moreover, the volunteers will remain under medical supervision on an out-patient basis after being discharged.

Sechenov University is reported to have started with the first stage of research on June 18 with a group of 18 volunteers. The second group of 20 volunteers was tested for the COVID-19 vaccine on June 23.

19.6 Highlights: Florida records more than 12,600 new Covid-19 cases

Source: hindustantimes.com,14 July,2020

India in the past few days has been witnessing a daily highest-spike in coronavirus cases. As per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, India registered yet another single-day spike of 28,701 Covid-19 cases and 500 deaths. Recovery numbers have overtaken active cases, but India hasn't yet reached its peak, after which the cases would start depleting. The states of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Karnataka are worst-hit by the pandemic. Fresh lockdowns ranging from a week to a fortnight have been imposed in several parts of the country to curb and check the spread of the infection.

A health worker wearing PPE overalls conducts a coronavirus test, at a COVID-19 testing centre

Multiple nations, including India are speeding up their research and development to come up with a vaccine that can provide absolute immunity against Covid-19 without any side effects. Last evening, Russia's Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University successfully completed the clinical trials on volunteers of the world's first vaccine.

In view of the rising cases in the United States, President Donald Trump was finally seen sporting a mask during his visit to a military hospital on Saturday. He said that he was never against facial coverings and that they have a time and place.

UK report 148 new coronavirus fatalities

The UK has reported 148 new coronavirus disease-related deaths over the preceding 24 hours, ANI reported.

This latest rise sees the UK's Covid-19 death toll rise to 44,798.

On Friday, just 48 new deaths were confirmed by public health officials.

Florida records more than 12,600 new coronavirus cases

Florida recorded more than 12,600 new coronavirus cases on Monday, its second-highest daily total since the outbreak began.

Florida along with Arizona, California and Texas have emerged as the new US epicenters of the coronavirus pandemic in recent weeks.

As Covid-19 cases rise, Disney to shut Hong Kong Disneyland again

Walt Disney Co. is temporarily closing its Hong Kong Disneyland theme park from July 15 amid rising coronavirus cases in the Chinese-ruled city, the company said Monday.

The announcement came two days after Disney reopened its biggest resort, Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, as coronavirus cases surged in the state.

No return to the 'old normal' for foreseeable future with Covid-19 pandemic: WHO

No return to the 'old normal' for foreseeable future with Covid-19 pandemic, said World Health Organisation's chief Tedros Adhanom on Monday as the global cases surpassed 13 million mark.

Philippines sees region's biggest daily rise in Covid-19 deaths

The Philippines reported Southeast Asia's biggest daily jump in Covid-19 deaths on Monday and warned of more fatalities ahead, as authorities scrambled to verify thousands of suspected cases and pressure grows on hospitals after the easing of a lockdown.

The health ministry reported 162 new deaths that were confirmed on Sunday plus another 65 on Monday, with 2,960 additional infections. The Philippines over the past week has reported higher daily infections than Indonesia, which has Southeast Asia's highest number of deaths and cases.

19.7 Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine phase 1 trial data to be released on July 20

Source: timesnownews.com,16 July,2020

London: The results of the first clinical trials of a potential coronavirus vaccine candidate being developed by the Oxford University and AstraZeneca will be published on July 20, according to the medical journal.

The Lancet. On Wednesday, ITV, citing a source, reported that positive news on initial trials of the AZD1222 COVID-19 vaccine, formerly known as ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 could be released on Thursday.

"We expect this paper, which is undergoing final editing and preparation, to be published on Monday, July 20, for immediate release," a spokeswoman for the journal was quoted as saying by Reuters.

According to Oxford researchers, the experimental vaccine provides 'double protection' from the novel coronavirus following early stage human trials. Blood samples taken from a group of volunteers who received a dose of the vaccine showed that it stimulated the body to produce both antibodies and killer T-cells, a senior source from the trial was quoted by The Daily Telegraph as saying.

The development came even as the US biotech company Moderna announced that it plans to start the final phase 3 trial of its experimental coronavirus vaccine on July 27. The findings from the phase 1 trial showed that Moderna's mRNA-1273 vaccine against the SARS-CoV-2 was safe and induced rapid, strong immune responses against the virus.

"I am hearing there will be positive news soon (perhaps tomorrow) on initial trials of the Oxford COVID-19 vaccine that is backed by AstraZeneca," ITV's political editor Robert Peston said in a blog post, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

The potential COVID-19 vaccine ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, which is being developed at the University of Oxford's Oxford Jenner Institute, has been licensed to AstraZeneca. The vaccine is already in large-scale Phase 3 human trials to assess whether it can protect against COVID-19 infection. However, the vaccine developers are yet to report the phase I results which would show whether or not it is safe or induces an immune response against the virus.

The vaccine developers were expected to publish the first phase study data in medical journal The Lancet by the end of July after they had revealed that they were encouraged by the immune response seen in trials conducted so far.

"(We) are not able to confirm when it will be released," a spokeswoman for Oxford University told Reuters, adding that the team was awaiting confirmation from a scientific journal of a publication date and time for the data, however, she gave no further details.

About the Oxford's ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine

ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine is made from a weakened and non-replicating version of a common cold virus (adenovirus) called ChAdOx1. According to a release in the Oxford Vaccine Group, the experimental COVID-19 vaccine has been engineered to express the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein. The vaccine was developed by adding genetic material – called spike glycoprotein – that is expressed on the surface of SARS-CoV-2 to the ChAdOx1 virus. Scientists hope that ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine will make the human body recognise and develop an immune response to the spike glycoprotein, which will help stop the SARS-CoV-2 virus from entering human cells.

In June, Dr Soumya Swaminathan, chief scientists at the World Health Organization, had said that Oxford and AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine is considered as the most advanced candidate in the world in terms of development. Currently, more than 100 coronavirus vaccines are being developed all over the world - with at least 21 candidates already in clinical evaluation.

Worldwide, the coronavirus has now claimed at least 579,938 lives and infected 13,407,780 people since the outbreak emerged in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

19.8 Covid-19 vaccine: Key updates on which country stands where on development

Source: livemint.com,19 July,2020

- India, Russia, US, UK are fast-tracking their processes to develop a vaccine for the virus

- US, Western Europe and China have all set up research programs and supply chains for Covid-19 vaccine production

The race for developing a potential Covid-19 vaccine is in the rounds for quite some time as the novel coronavirus cases across the world has crossed 14 million-mark in infections and killed over 6 six lakh people.

Amid the infections and recoveries, several countries such as India, Russia, US, UK are fast-tracking their processes to develop a vaccine for the virus. US, Western Europe and China have all set up research programs and supply chains for Covid-19 vaccine production.

India:

India's first indigenous Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin got a nod from the AIIMS Ethics Committee on Saturday to start human trials from Monday. AIIMS-Delhi is among the 12 sites selected by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) for conducting phase I and II human trials of Covaxin. In phase I, the vaccine would be tested on 375 volunteers and a maximum of 100 of them would be from AIIMS.

Drug firm Zydus Cadila also said it has started human clinical trials of its COVID-19 vaccine candidate ZyCoV-D. In the phase of trials, the company will be enrolling over 1,000 subjects across multiple clinical study sites in India, it said in a regulatory filing.

A photo shows vaccines in prefilled, single-use syringes before the inspection and packaging phase at the French pharmaceutical company Sanofi's world distribution centre in Val de Reuil on July 10, 2020

Russia:

Russian health minister said they will make a coronavirus vaccine candidate it is working on available to general public before it clears the third and last phase of clinical trials, according to a new report.

According to a Bloomberg report, Kirill Dmitriev, the chief executive of the government-backed Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), said the vaccine will start phase 3 trials in thousands of people on Aug. 3 in Russia as well as in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "Russia could make 30 million doses domestically in 2020, and 170 million abroad, with five countries expressing interest in producing the vaccine and others willing to produce it", he said.

China:

China has positioned itself to be a strong contender. The human trials being conducted by Chinese company Sinovac Biotech have reached the third stage. This is the first vaccine to reach the third stage of human trials. The first dose was given to 15,000 registered volunteers in Abu Dhabi. They were administered the vaccine twice within 28 days and the researchers saw development of anti-bodies in them. There are four vaccines being developed in China for Covid-19.

Eight of the nearly two dozen potential vaccines in various stages of human testing worldwide are from China, the most of any country. And SinoPharm and another Chinese company already have announced they're entering final testing.

United Kingdom:

Th vaccine developed by Oxford University and Imperial College are in second and third stage of human trials. In the second stage, 105 people are expected to be administered the vaccine. The stage 3 trial is expected to begin in November and will cover 6,000 people.

Recently, researchers at the University of Oxford believe they may have a breakthrough in their search for a COVID-19 vaccine after the team discovered that the jab could provide "double protection" against the deadly coronavirus following early stage human trials, according to media reports in the UK.

Blood samples taken from a group of UK volunteers given a dose of the vaccine showed that it stimulated the body to produce both antibodies and "killer T-cells", a senior source from the trial was quoted by 'The Daily Telegraph' as saying.

United States:

US biotech firm's Covid-19 vaccine produced antibodies to the coronavirus in, all patients tested in an initial safety trial, federal researchers said. Moderna's initial results are from the first group of 45 patients who received the vaccine, called mRNA-1273. It evaluated three doses that were given in a two-shot regimen. The middle one was selected for use in the large final-stage study that is slated to begin on July 27th.

19.9 Human trials of second Russian Covid-19 vaccine to start July 27: TASS

Source: timesofindia.indiatimes.com,24 July,2020

MOSCOW: Human trials of Russia's second potential coronavirus vaccine, developed by the Siberian Vector institute, will begin on July 27, the TASS news agency cited Russia's consumer safety watchdog as saying on Friday.

An early-stage human trial of a separate vaccine, developed by the Gamaleya institute in Moscow, was completed this month, with scientists hailing the results and authorities planning to move to mass production in the autumn.

19.10 COVID-19 is not just seasonal, cautions WHO, as 'first wave' continues

Source: news.un.org,28 July,2020

"The season does not seem to be affecting the transmission of this virus", said Dr. Margaret Harris, World Health Organization (WHO) spokesperson, highlighting many people's "fixed" belief to the contrary.

A woman pays for her groceries at a supermarket in Brazil, while practicing the necessary precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"What is affecting the transmission is mass gatherings, it's people coming together, and people not social distancing, not taking the precautions to ensure they are not in close contact."

Globally, WHO has reported as on Tuesday morning Geneva time, 16,301,736 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 650,069 deaths.

Hotspots

The Americas remains the epicentre by region, with more than 8.7 million cases, followed by Europe (3.2 million), South-East Asia (1.8 million), Eastern Mediterranean (1.5 million), Africa (712,920) and Western Pacific (291,993).

During a scheduled virtual press conference, Dr. Harris noted that the biggest outbreak "with the most intense, the highest numbers", remained the US, where it is the middle of summer.

Brazil had also seen high infection rates, despite being an equatorial country, the WHO spokesperson continued.

'Later' flu season in Global South

Turning to countries in the global south, Dr Harris noted that winter was underway there, with samples tested, indicating "high" COVID infection rates but low influenza traces. "Now the interesting thing is we are seeing from those samples, high levels of COVID, but we're

not seeing high levels of influenza at the moment. So, we're expecting a later flu season in the southern hemisphere."

The development is in line with WHO's latest influenza update indicating that globally, influenza activity is currently at lower-than-expected levels.

In temperate areas of the northern hemisphere, influenza activity has "returned to inter-seasonal levels".

In Caribbean, Central American, South American, tropical African, Southern Asia and South East Asia countries, the WHO bulletin reported that there have been only sporadic or no cases detected.

Assessing the impact on countries finding themselves having to tackle both COVID-19 and influenza at the same time, the WHO spokesperson debated whether a "melange" of respiratory diseases might prove problematic.

"That would be a concern, because if you have an increase in respiratory illness when you already have a very high burden of respiratory illness, that puts even more pressure on the health system," she said.

'One big wave'

Dr Harris also pushed back on the perception that a respiratory illness might come and go in several waves.

"It's going to be one big wave", she said. "It's going to go up and down a bit…the best thing is to flatten it and turn it into just something that is lapping at your feet. But at the moment, first, second, third wave, these things don't really make sense and we're not really defining it that way."

Asked about the WHO's stance on charging for COVID-19 testing, the WHO official explained that this was a decision governed by countries alone.

"Now we do everything we can to encourage all countries to test, because testing is absolutely essential," she said.

"You don't know where your outbreak is if you're not testing people. And we also encourage all countries to make access to testing wide and available".

19.11 US records nearly 25,000 Covid-19 deaths in July, cases rise by 1.8 mn

Source:hindustantimes.com,31 July,2020

The United States shattered single day global records in July by reporting over 77,000 new cases on July 16.

US coronavirus deaths rose by almost 25,000 in July and cases doubled in at least 18 states during the month, according to a Reuters tally, dealing a crushing blow to hopes of quickly reopening the economy.

The United States has recorded nearly 1.8 million new cases in July out of its total 4.5 million infections, an increase of 66% with many states yet to report on Friday. Deaths in July rose at least 19% to over 152,000 total.

File photo of people waiting in line at a walk-up testing site for Covid-19 during the new coronavirus pandemic, in Miami Beach, Florida

The biggest increases were in Florida, with over 300,000 new cases in July, followed by California and Texas with about 250,000 each. Those three states also saw cases double in June.

Cases also more than doubled in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia, according to the tally.

Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York had the lowest increases, with cases rising 7% or less.

The United States shattered single day global records in July by reporting over 77,000 new cases on July 16. During the month, 33 out of 50 states had one-day record increases in cases and 19 set records for how much deaths rose in 24 hours, according to a Reuters tally.

After a rapid acceleration in cases, the outbreak appears to be stabilizing in Arizona, Florida and Texas. Health officials are now concerned the outbreak has migrated to the Midwest from summer travel.

The news that more states could be hard hit by the virus comes a day after the US gross domestic product collapsed at a 32.9% annualized rate last quarter, the nation's worst economic performance since the Great Depression.

AUGUST 2020

20.1 Coronavirus vaccine tracker, August 2: Clinical trials of Russian vaccine have been completed

Source:indianexpress.com,2 August,2020

Russia's health minister was quoted in the news reports as saying that a mass vaccination programme, presumably using this vaccine, would be launched in Russia in October and that doctors and teachers would be among the first groups to be vaccinated.

A blood sample from a volunteer is handled in the laboratory at Imperial College in London

A potential novel Coronavirus vaccine being developed by Moscow's Gamaleya Institute had completed clinical trials, and 'paperwork' for its 'registration' with the country's regulatory body was underway, Russian media reported on Saturday.

Russia's health minister was quoted in the news reports as saying that a mass vaccination programme, presumably using this vaccine, would be launched in Russia in October and that doctors and teachers would be among the first groups to be vaccinated.

The reports did not specify whether all the three stages of clinical trials were over, or only stage-II was completed. A news report by Russia's Tass news agency in the second week of July had said that this candidate vaccine had entered phase-II of clinical trials on July 13. Phase-II trials, in which the vaccine is tested for its ability to trigger immune response in human beings, usually takes a few months to be completed. Read in Tamil.

But because of the prevailing Covid19 emergency, vaccine developments across the globe are being fast-tracked. Yet, the Russian vaccine has raised concerns because of the

speed at which it is being pushed through. It is most likely to be approved without phase-III trials being carried out. Phase-III trials assess whether the vaccine works in real life situations, essentially whether it offers protection to the people against the disease for which it is being developed. Phase-III trials are usually carried out on several thousand volunteers, and takes months or years to be completed.

Some earlier news reports from Russia had indicated that phase-III trials would be carried out alongside the deployment of the vaccine for public use. But there was no mention of this fact on Saturday.
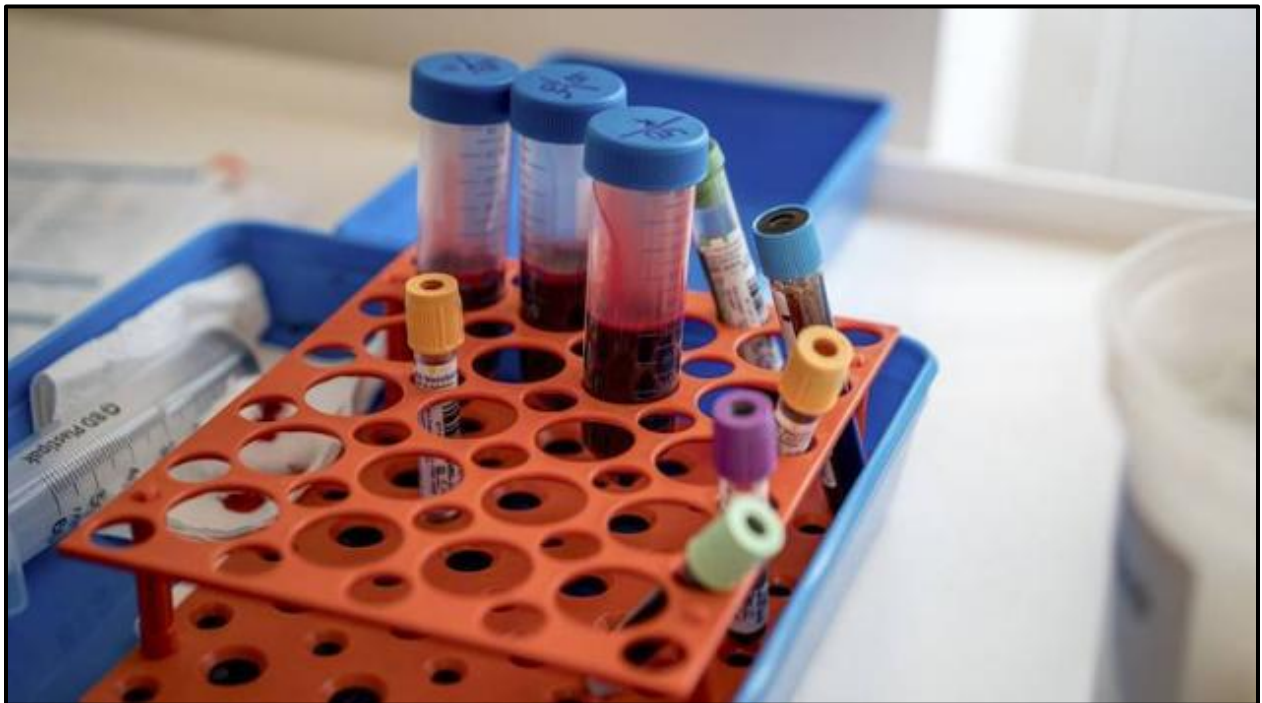
Blood samples taken from a volunteer during a vaccine trial at Churchill Hospital in Oxford

The completion of trials are no guarantee of a vaccine getting the approval of the regulator to be used on public. Data generated by human trials are assessed in detail, and in most cases, fail to convince the regulator. Vaccines have a very poor rate of getting approved by regulatory authorities. Only a very small number of vaccines that are developed actually get the approval to be used. In the case of the Russian Coronavirus vaccine, however, a regulatory approval is being taken almost for granted.

Because of these reasons, there is some amount of scepticism with regard to the Russian vaccine. This scepticism was expressed by top US infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci as well, during his testimony to a panel of US lawmakers on Friday.

"I do hope that the Chinese and the Russians are actually testing the vaccines before they are administering the vaccine to anyone. Because claims of having a vaccine ready to distribute before you do testing is problematic at the very least," Fauci said.

In China, one Coronavirus vaccine has already been approved for limited use after completion of phase-II trials. This is being administered only to military personnel for the time being. At least seven Chinese candidates are currently being tested on human beings.

A volunteer being injected as the world's biggest study of a possible COVID-19 vaccine, developed by the National Institutes of Health and Moderna Inc., gets underway in Binghamton, N.Y.

Serum Institute gets expert committee go-ahead to test Oxford vaccine in India

Just three days after it had held back its approval, an expert committee of India's drug regulatory body has given its go-ahead to Pune's Serum Institute to test the Oxford University vaccine candidate in India, after the company revised its application and provided more information. Serum Institute, the world's largest producer of vaccines by volume, has struck an agreement with Swedish-British pharmaceutical major AstraZeneca,

which is co-developing a novel Coronavirus vaccine with Oxford University, to manufacture the vaccine for middle and low-income countries at its Pune facility.

The company had sought regulatory approval to carry out phase-II and phase-III trials of the vaccine on Indian volunteers later this month. The vaccine, to be called 'Covishield' in India, is currently undergoing phase-III trials elsewhere as well. In India, the clinical trials are sought to be done on about 1,600 participants.

At the previous hearing, the expert committee had sought more information from the company about the trials, which Serum did on Friday. After this, the committee has recommended that Serum be allowed to conduct the trials. The recommendation has to be approved by the Drug Controller General of India.

20.2 Latin America exceeds five million COVID-19 cases

Source:wionews.com,4 August,2020

emetery workers dig new graves at the Xico cemetery on the outskirts of Mexico City, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak continues in Mexico, July 31, 2020

Latin America broke through 5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 on Monday, a Reuters tally showed, underscoring that the region is the area of the world hardest hit by the novel coronavirus pandemic. The coronavirus was initially slower to reach Latin America - home

to about 640 million people - than much of the world. But health experts say it has been hard to control the virus due to the region's poverty and densely packed cities.

The more than 10,000 new cases reported by Colombia's health ministry on Monday pushed the region past the 5 million mark, a day after the Andean nation reported a record 11,470 cases.

Latin America has now topped 200,000 deaths. Brazil's total approached 96,000 on Monday and Mexico surpassed 48,000. The two countries have the world's second and third highest death tolls, after the United States. North America is the region with the second highest number of cases, with 4.8 million infections, according to a Reuters tally, followed by Europe and Asia, which have around 3 million infections each.

Latin America is particularly vulnerable to the virus due to high levels of poverty, urbanization and labor informality, according to a July 30 report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Pan American Health Organization.

More than 100 million people across Latin America and the Caribbean live in slums, according to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Many have jobs in the informal sector with little in the way of a social safety net and have continued to work throughout the pandemic.

"The pandemic has become an precedented economic and social crisis and, if urgent measures are not taken, it could transform into a food, humanitarian, and political crisis," the report warned. Latin America has also a high death rate from the virus, likely due to a number of factors, including high levels of underlying conditions such as diabetes and obesity.

20.3 Russia all set to launch world's first COVID-19 vaccine next week, 'hope they have tested it', says Fauci

Source: livemint.com,8 August,2020

- The vaccine was developed by Gamaleya Research Institute and the Russian Defence Ministry

- Clinical trials of the vaccine began on June 17 among 76 volunteers

Amid the high number of coronavirus cases across the world, Russia is all set to register world's first COVID-19 vaccine next week, according to reports. The vaccine was

developed by Gamaleya Research Institute and the Russian Defence Ministry. The vaccine will be registered on August 12.

"The COVID-19 vaccine developed by the Gamaleya centre will be registered on August 12. At the moment, the last, third, stage is underway. The trials are extremely important. We have to understand that the vaccine must be safe. Medical professionals and senior citizens will be the first to get vaccinated," Gridnev told reporters, according to reports. After the registration, the vaccine will be reportedly tested on about 1,600 people to ensure its safety and effectiveness.

In April, Russia President Vladimir Putin ordered state officials to shorten the time of clinical trials for a variety of drugs, including potential coronavirus vaccines.

World Health Organization on Tuesday urged Russia to follow the established guidelines for producing a COVID-19 vaccine

Clinical trials of the vaccine began on June 17 among 76 volunteers. Half were injected with a vaccine in liquid form and the other half with a vaccine that came as soluble powder, according to news agency AP.

Initial reports showed immunity in all participants, the Russian Defence Ministry said. "The results of the check-up clearly demonstrate an unmistakable immune response attained through the vaccination. No side effects or issues with the body of the volunteers were found", the ministry said, according to Sputnik News.

"We are very much counting on starting mass production in September," Industry Minister Denis Manturov said in an interview published by state news agency TASS.

World Health Organization on Tuesday urged Russia to follow the established guidelines for producing safe and effective vaccines after Moscow announced plans to start swiftly producing COVID-19 jabs.

"There are established practices and there are guidelines out," WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier told reporters at the United Nations in Geneva. "Between finding or having a clue of maybe having a vaccine that works, and having gone through all the stages, is a big difference." he said.

Apart from the vaccine formulated by the Gamaleya Research Institute, Russia's Vektor State Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology has also started developing a COVID-19 vaccine.

"I'm worried that Russia is cutting corners so that the vaccine that will come out may be not just ineffective, but also unsafe," said Lawrence Gostin, a global public health law expert at Georgetown University.

Dr Anthony Fauci, the top US infectious disease specialist, questioned the fast-track approach last week.

"I do hope that the Chinese and the Russians are actually testing a vaccine before they are administering the vaccine to anyone, because claims of having a vaccine ready to distribute before you do testing I think is problematic at best," he said.

20.4 Covid cases among children in US increased by 40% in late July

Source:theprint.in,10 August,2020

The report, which aggregates data from 49 states, comes amid heated debate in the country over whether schools should re-open in the fall.

Tokyo: Coronavirus infections among U.S. children grew 40% in the last half of July, according to a report from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association, bringing the total number of child infections to 8.8% of all U.S. cases.

The report, which aggregates data from 49 states, comes amid heated debate over whether schools should re-open in the fall. While the surge of infections contradicts President Donald Trump's assertion that kids are "virtually immune," the data also show that child infections make up a disproportionately small share of the overall outbreak in the U.S.

Many parents are eager to get their kids back in classes. Yet Covid-19 is still surging in much of the country, and there is conflicting data about how Covid-19 is transmitted to and from children.

Some schools that have already resumed classes have experienced outbreaks amid scenes of kids crowded together without wearing masks, raising fears that a full nationwide re-opening in September will cause a new spike of infection.

The study said 97,078 new child cases were reported from July 16-30, bringing the total number since the pandemic began to 338,982. The range of ages varied from state to state, with some including an age limit as high as 24.

California, Florida and Arizona had the highest number of total child cases in the U.S., with more than 20,000 each, the report found. By population, Arizona had the highest count, with more than 1,000 cases per 100,000 children, more than double the national average of 447.

Deaths among U.S. children from Covid-19 total 86, only 0.06% of total fatalities in the country and 0.03% of infections among children.

20.5 Coronavirus vaccine tracker, August 12: When will the Russian vaccine be available?

Source: indianexpress.com,12 August,2020

Even in the current fast-paced environment, phase-2 and phase-3 trials of the Russian vaccine in India would take at least two to three months. That is, after someone moves an application before the drug regulator asking for permission to conduct the trials.

The new vaccine is on display at the Nikolai Gamaleya National Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Moscow, Russia

Russia has delivered on its promise to develop the world's first vaccine for novel Coronavirus. On Tuesday, it announced that it had approved a vaccine being developed by Moscow's Gamaleya Institute. The announcement has been met with excitement as well as skepticism due to the fact that the vaccine has been cleared without phase-3 human trials. Even the phase-1 and phase-2 trials have been rushed, all of it being completed within two months.

However, it still might be some distance away from becoming generally accessible, especially to people outside Russia. The vaccine is likely to get into production immediately. Apart from the facility at the Gamaleya Institute itself, it is supposed to be manufactured by Sistema, a big Russian business house. In a statement on Tuesday, Sistema said the first batches of the vaccine were ready, and would be shortly shipped to Russian provinces to be administered first to doctors and healthcare workers who are at high risk of infection.

However, the Sistema facility has the capacity to produce only 1.5 million doses of a vaccine in a year, a woefully inadequate quantity considering that the immediate global demand is of billions of doses. As a result, Russia's capability to service the demand in other countries looks severely limited, as of now. Russia has, however, said it had entered into international agreements to produce 500 million doses of the vaccine annually. It has also said that it had received requests for 1 billion doses of the vaccine from foreign countries.

But even if the manufacturing issue is taken care of, there is regulatory hurdle to be crossed in the deployment of the Russian vaccine in countries like India. There are two ways in which this vaccine can be approved for use in India. The Indian regulatory system requires at least late phase human trials to be conducted on local population before any vaccine, or drug, developed in other countries, is approved for use in India. That is because a vaccine generally elicits different immune responses from different population groups. That would mean that the Russian developers, or their partners in India, would have to carry out phase-2 and phase-3 trials on the vaccine on Indian volunteers. This is the process that was recently followed in the case of the vaccine being developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca. Pune-based Serum Institute of India, which has a manufacturing agreement with the developers to produce the vaccine, recently received the regulator's nod to conduct phase-2 and phase-3 trials on the vaccine in India. Only if these tests are satisfactory that the Oxford University vaccine would be allowed to be used on Indian people.

Even in the current fast-paced environment, phase-2 and phase-3 trials of the Russian vaccine in India would take at least two to three months. That is, after someone moves an application before the drug regulator asking for permission to conduct the trials. So far, no such application has been moved.

But considering the current urgent situation, the Russian vaccine can also get an emergency authorization from India's drug regulator. That would allow the vaccine to be used without the late phase trials. The drug regulator can say that it is satisfied with the results of the human trials conducted in Russia, and considering the gravity of the prevailing situation, it can grant emergency approval to the vaccine, without the need for human trials in India. Recently, the drug Remdesivir was granted such emergency approval, to be administered to novel Coronavirus patients.

But this is a route that experts believe is unlikely to be taken in the case of Russian vaccine. That is because, unlike a drug that is given only to patients, and that too only at the consideration of the doctor, the vaccine is supposed to be administered to general public. More so in the case of the current pandemic. For most of the other diseases, only children are vaccinated these days, because the older populations have already been vaccinated earlier. But for novel Coronavirus, everyone needs to be vaccinated. The risk of using a

vaccine on such large number of people without having conducted late phase trials are much higher. Also, Remdesivir was an already approved drug that was just being re-purposed to treat Coronavirus patients. Its safety was never in doubt. Only its effectiveness on treating Covid-19 disease was uncertain. In the case of the Russian vaccine, however, even the safety of the vaccine would be uncertain if the late phase trials are not conducted.

Not everyone seems to be excited with the prospect of having a novel Coroanvirus vaccine, though. A new research survey in the United Kingdom shows that just over half the population was sure of getting the vaccine when it was available. In a survey of 2,237 UK residents carried out by researches from King's College London, and polling agency Ipsos MORI, only 53 per cent of the respondents said they would be certain, or very likely, to get the vaccine. About 16 per cent of surveyed people said they were unlikely to, or definitely won't, get the vaccine.

Similar polls carried out in the United States in June and July have showed between 50 per cent to 67 per cent people willing to take the vaccine shots when it becomes available.

An employee works with a coronavirus vaccine at the Nikolai Gamaleya National Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Moscow, Russia

Russian vaccine is not the first one… a Chinese vaccine is already in use

Incidentally, the Russian vaccine against novel Coroanvirus is the not the first one to be approved. A Chinese vaccine, developed by CanSino Biologicals, was approved in June itself. But it was meant only for limited use, to be administered on soldiers of the People's Liberation Army. China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences is a co-developer of the vaccine.

It is not known how many soldiers of the Chinese army have already been given this vaccine.

Like the Russian vaccine, this one too was approved without phase-3 human trials. A couple of days, the company announced that it would getting ready to conduct phase-3 trials in a hospital in Saudi Arabia.

20.6 COVID-19 has caused humanity's ecological footprint to contract by 3 weeks

Source: downtoearth.org,14 August,2020

Earth Overshoot Day this year is on August 22, much later than July 29 last year

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has caused humanity's ecological footprint to contract by three weeks, a new report has said.

Earth Overshoot Day 2020 is on August 22, more than three weeks later than in 2019 (July 29), according to the Earth Overshoot Calculation Report 2020, brought out by international research organisation, Global Footprint Network.

This means human beings consumed 9.3 per cent lesser resources between January 1 and August 22, compared to the same period last year, which is a direct consequence of the coronavirus-induced lockdowns around the world, a statement by the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature, said.

Decreases in wood harvest and carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion have been the major drivers behind the historic shift in the long-term growth of humanity's ecological footprint, the statement said.

"This shift in the year-to-year date of Earth Overshoot Day represents the greatest ever single-year shift since the beginning of global overshoot in the early 1970s. In several instances, the date was pushed back temporarily, such as in the aftermath of the post-2008 Great Recession, but the general trend remains that of a consistent upward trajectory," the Earth Overshoot Calculation Report 2020, said.

Humanity as a whole is currently using nature 1.6 times faster than our planet's ecosystems can regenerate. This is akin to using 1.6 Earths.

The sudden ecological footprint contraction is, however, a far cry from the intentional change which is required to achieve both ecological balance and people's well-being, two inextricable components of sustainability.

Moving the date of Earth Overshoot Day back five days each year would allow humanity to reach one-planet compatibility before 2050.

However, for that, significant efforts would have to be made in five key areas: cities, energy, food, population and the planet itself, the WWF statement said.

For instance, cutting carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel burning by 50 per cent would move the date by 93 days, it added.

20.7 COVID-19 hits U.S. mink farms after ripping through Europe

Source: sciencemag.org,18 August,2020

COVID-19 has now struck mink farms in the United States, too. Yesterday, roughly 10 days after farmers in Utah reported a rash of mink deaths, the U.S. Department of Agriculture

(USDA) confirmed the SARS-CoV-2 virus had infected the weasellike mammals, which are raised for their fur.

Infections of mink have already been documented in other countries, including Denmark, the Netherlands, and Spain. In June, authorities in these countries gassed hundreds of thousands of animals, concerned that the mink could harbor the virus indefinitely, enabling infections to persist among farm animals—and potentially spread to humans.

In Utah, the trouble started on 6 August, when farmers called the state's Department of Agriculture and Food. At issue: "deaths in numbers they'd never seen before," said Bradie Jones, the department's public information officer. The wave of deaths set things into high gear, and farmers quickly sent deceased animals to Tom Baldwin, a veterinary pathologist at Utah State University, Logan, for inspection.

The initial samples were not usable, Baldwin says, because they had deteriorated by the time they arrived on 7 August. Eventually, however, some of the "great many" dead mink he received were in good enough condition to be necropsied. After cutting them open, he says he found lungs that were "wet, heavy, red, and angry," all signs of pneumonia. That type of pneumonia is not typical in mink, he notes, but it was nearly identical to photographs of mink necropsies performed in Europe.

By 14 August, both the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory and USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratory had confirmed the animals were infected with the COVID-19 virus.

The mink cases have "big implications … and [are] worthy of everyone's attention," says Dean Taylor, Utah's state veterinarian. One issue is that U.S. mink farmers will now have to be on the lookout for the virus, which can spread rapidly. (As of 30 July, 27 farms in the Netherlands had confirmed infections.) There are at least 245 mink farms in 22 states, according to Fur Commission USA, the nation's largest association of mink farmers. More than three dozen farms operate in Utah, according to Clayton Beckstead, northeastern regional manager of the Utah Farm Bureau Federation.

"The threat to the livelihoods of those who farm the mink is very real," Baldwin says, in large part because farms may be required to eradicate infected animals. In the Netherlands, farmers had killed more than 1 million mink as of 2 August. U.S. farms churn out more than 2.5 million pelts annually, according to USDA. Utah is the country's second highest producer, processing more than 550,000 pelts annually.

There are still "big, unanswered question[s]" regarding "how readily this virus can move from mink into human beings," Baldwin says. The Dutch government reported multiple cases of transmission from mink to farm staff, and several staffers on the Utah farms who came in contact with the mink have confirmed COVID-19. Researchers are now trying to determine whether these workers gave the virus to the mink, or vice versa. The two farms are under 30-day quarantines, as USDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and state authorities investigate further.

Even a nonzero chance that the virus could mutate and amplify in mink populations— before making a jump back into humans—is worrisome, Baldwin says. "Given we're dealing with real people with families and husbands and wives," he says, "that's enough for me to consider this a very serious matter."

20.8 Sweden records highest deaths in 150 years in first-half of 2020

Source:wionews.com,20 August,2020

Sweden, in the first half of 2020, broke a grim record of highest deaths in 150 years, according to the official statistics record.

As many as 51,405 deaths were registered in Sweden in between January and June this year, highest since 1869 when the country was hit by famine.

The country was severely criticised to not enforce a lockdown when coronavirus pandemic ravaged Europe, which led to a sharp rise in coronavirus cases.

Sweden's coronavirus death toll stands at 5,802.

A lot of COVID-19 deaths in Sweden took place in care homes, and Sweden's chief epidemiologist Anders Tegnell acknowledged in June that the country's health authority "didn't know that there would be such a big potential for the disease to spread in elderly care homes, with so many deaths," reported CNN.

"There are things that we could have done better but in general I think that Sweden has chosen the right way," he had said to Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter:

With an increase of 6,860, the country also saw the lowest population increase since 2005 that was less than half of what was recorded the last year.

20.9 Coronavirus vaccine update: Russia will test Sputnik-V on 40,000 people; J&J announces largest human trials

Source: indianexpress.com,21 August,2020

Facing global criticism for pushing through its vaccine without testing it adequately, Russia has been on a publicity overdrive to minimise the damage.

Johnson & Johnson, one of the leading contenders to develop a vaccine for novel Coronavirus, has said it planned to test its vaccine on about 60,000 people during the phase-3 trials, This makes it the biggest human trial planned for a potential Coronavirus vaccine till now. Other leading contenders like Moderna and Pfizer plan to enrol about 30,000 volunteers for phase-3 trials of their candidate vaccines, which has already begun.

Johnson & Johnson said it hoped to begin the phase-3 trials from September, and it was trying to enlist up to 60,000 healthy people above 18 years of age. The trials are supposed to be carried out at about 180 locations in the United States, Mexico and Brazil.

A medical staff works with test samples from possible Covid-19 patients at a laboratory at the Eurnekian Ezeiza Hospital in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Thursday, August 13, 2020.

"We can confirm that planning and recruitment is underway for our phase-3 programme, which is subject to interim data of the phase-1/2 trials and approval of the regulators. Our phase-3 programme is intended to be as robust as possible, could include up to 60,000 participants and will be conducted in places with high incidence rates," Reuters quoted a J&J spokesperson as saying.

Amidst criticism, Russia says will test its vaccine on 40,000 people

Russia has said it planned to test its already-approved vaccine, which has been named Sputnik-V, on 40,000 people in phase-3 trials. Russia had approved the vaccine developed by Moscow's Gamaleya Institute on August 11, even without phase-3 trials. The vaccine had only undergone accelerated phase-1 and phase-2 human trials.

Facing global criticism for pushing through its vaccine without testing it adequately, Russia has been on a publicity overdrive to minimise the damage. It has launched a special website for the vaccine, where it seeks to provide all information and data related to the vaccine.

On Thursday, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), a sovereign wealth fund that is supporting the development of Sputnik-V vaccine, put out a detailed statement in which it listed reasons why the questions being raised about the vaccine were unfounded and why the vaccine was safe for public use.

In the same statement, RDIF also announced that the vaccine would enter phase-3 clinical trials next week, during which it would be tested on more than 40,000 people at over 45 locations. RDIF said these trials were "previously planned" and were supposed to take place "post-registration" of the vaccine with the Russian drug regulator.

In a separate interaction with journalists, Denis Logunov, deputy director for scientific work at Gamaleya Institute, said that the Russian vaccine had only been granted a "conditional registration certificate" by the country's drug regulator, and that meant it was obligated to undergo phase-3 clinical trials, according to a news report.

20.10 Why do Covid fatalities remain low when infection numbers are rising?

Source: theguardian.com,23 August,2020

While some scientists believe the virus has become less deadly, others look at the factors that suggest otherwise

Some researchers believe that social distancing has led to smaller amounts of the virus being transmitted

Are Covid-19 death rates decreasing?

Most statistics indicate that although cases of Covid-19 are rising in many parts of Europe and the United States, the number of deaths and cases of severe complications remain relatively low. For example, patients on ventilators have dropped from 3,000 at the

epidemic's peak in Britain to 70. At the same time, the number of cases in the UK have begun to rise in many areas.

What lies behind this trend?

Doctors are unsure exactly what is going on. Some suggest that medical interventions are more successful at treating those who suffer complications from the disease. For example, the drug dexamethasone was recently shown to improve survival rates among patients requiring ventilation. Others argue that different factors are involved. One suggestion is that Covid-19 is now becoming a disease of younger people who are less likely to die or suffer serious complications.

Does that indicate that the worst may be over?

No. Other researchers point to the situation in the US where there was a recent spike in cases among people in their 20s and 30s – but which was then followed by a spike in cases in older people who picked up the disease from younger people. As a result, there has been a jump in deaths. A similar pattern could occur in Europe and in the UK, possibly in a couple of weeks, some scientists warn.

Is the Covid-19 virus becoming less deadly?

This idea is supported by some scientists. They point to the fact that most viruses tend to lose their most lethal attributes because they gain nothing from killing off their hosts. This could be happening with the Covid-19 virus, they say. Other researchers disagree, saying such a process is unlikely to be happening this quickly. One alternative suggestion is that infectious doses of the Covid-19 virus, transmitted from one person to another, may be getting smaller thanks to social distancing. Lower doses would then be easier for our immune systems to tackle, so death rates would drop.

In the end, these issues remain unresolved and will require many more months, if not years of research, to work out, scientists warn.

20.11 South Korea's Search for a COVD-19 Vaccine

Source: thediplomat.com,26 August,2020

The threat of a second wave seems to have renewed the sense of urgency for producing a vaccine.

Despite the successes of South Korea's testing-led efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 to date, a recent spike in new cases emphasizes this approach is still only a short-term

solution. Last Saturday the country reported 397 new infections, up from the 30 reported on August 1, prompting new government measures to prevent a second outbreak that could roll back significant progress made in public health and the domestic economy since late February. Amid these fears, the threat of a second wave seems to have renewed the sense of urgency for producing a vaccine.

Like many other major economies, South Korea has been rushing to find a vaccine for the coronavirus since the beginning of the year. The government has pursued a two-pronged approach to eventually meet its goal of securing enough vaccines for all 50 million South Koreans – or at least the 70 percent of the population necessary to develop herd immunity. The first prong is promoting the work of local companies while the second is geared toward the international community.

Three South Korean companies are currently developing COVID-19 vaccines, all of which are already in clinical trials or are on pace to start them before the end of the year. South Korean biotech firm Genexine was the first to launch human clinical trials within the country; that project involves collaboration by South Korean-based companies and institutions such as the Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology. Pharmaceutical company GeneOne Life Science and SK Bioscience are developing their own vaccines as well, but are still in the animal testing phase. SK's efforts have garnered support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, though the company has also signed on to be a supplier for other major vaccine candidates.

On August 13, SK Bioscience penned a deal with U.S. biotech company Novavax to manufacture a key antigen for its vaccine, which is entering the second stage of trials and already has purchase agreements with the U.S. and U.K. governments. SK is also directly involved in another front-runner vaccine candidate being developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University. Last month SK, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and AstraZeneca reached an agreement to make core elements of the vaccine in SK's facilities in Andong. In both cases SK and the Moon administration worked out that the vaccines resulting from this cooperation would be made locally available.

In terms of international cooperation, the Moon administration has publicly expressed interest in the COVAX Initiative – led by the World Health Organization and other major international institutions dedicated to vaccinations – to quickly distribute a vaccine once one that is safe and effective becomes available. Though chiefly set up to ensure access for developing countries, South Korea's support for the facility would still allow for – at least as planned – some early access to a vaccine in case of otherwise limited access. The challenge, however, remains that some of the governments host to the most promising candidates have not publicly endorsed the scheme.

Of course, the race to find a COVID-19 vaccine is highly competitive with major possible geopolitical implications. The current positioning of players suggests South Korea's best bet for relatively fast access to a vaccine is either of SK's collaborations, not any of the three domestically led endeavors. However, the global race is not yet over. Who reaches a vaccine first, how they go about meeting high demand, and how quickly other vaccine candidates are able to follow in getting to market will be key in determining how the rest of the contest will play out for South Korea.

The backdrop of deteriorating U.S.-China relations and the rise of nationalism could certainly have a significant impact on South Korea's search for a vaccine. Of the nine vaccines that COVAX is tracking – considered the leading candidates – three originate in the United States while two come from China. In recent years, Seoul has increasingly found itself in the uncomfortable position of being stuck between Beijing and Washington – its largest trading partner and most important ally, respectively. China has already been reaching out to strategic partners such as the Philippines and Pakistan promising to provide doses of a finished vaccine. The White House has not publicly discussed plans to send vaccines overseas, but comments from the administration as well as the severity of the virus in the U.S. imply vaccines are not being as seriously considered as a diplomatic tool. South Korea may ultimately not need any Chinese vaccines, but it could prove a sticking point with the United States if a substantial bilateral agreement with Beijing is worked out. This, however, could prove a moot point come the U.S. presidential elections in November.

More broadly, "vaccine nationalism" could prove even more problematic. Much as some countries hoarded vital medical supplies such as respirators and surgical masks in earlier stages of the pandemic, they do the same for vaccines. Without hoarding we should still expect a long wait once a vaccine reaches market as it will take time to scale up production to meet the massive demand. Should the country hosting the first successful vaccine candidate decide to amass doses at home, this would only further strain vital access for everyone else. In this sense, even if the vaccine candidates South Korean companies are involved with are not among the first to market, there is reason to push ahead quickly with production beyond the bottom line of these individual firms. Additionally, SK Bioscience's

agreements with leading U.S. vaccine candidates cannot effectively ensure against Washington making South Korea less of a priority than Seoul would like. In such a case, the three South Korean-led candidates could serve as a backstop, though avoiding this scenario would be more ideal.

Throughout the pandemic Seoul has been one of the most ardent supporters of multilateralism and would do well to continue to push for international cooperation on the production and distribution of a successful vaccine. While South Korean companies have made substantial progress on their own vaccine candidates and are embedded in the supply chain of others, many unknowns still lie ahead. The best way now to hedge against these risks and meet this critical need is seemingly to help promote more open access to a COVID-19 vaccine through global initiatives such as COVAX

20.12 France Covid-19: Paris compulsory face-mask rule comes into force

Source: bbc.com,28 August,2020

Parisian cyclists don't have to wear a face mask but some are taking extra precautions

Wearing a face mask in public has become mandatory across Paris and several surrounding areas, amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in France.

On Friday the country recorded 7,379 new infections - its highest number since early May.

The number of "red zones" where the virus is in active circulation has risen from two to 21.

Announcing new local curbs on Thursday, PM Jean Castex said he wanted to avoid another general lockdown.

He said the coronavirus was "gaining ground" across France, and that if the government did not act fast infection growth could become "exponential".

Despite a sharp rise in cases in recent weeks, daily death tolls have remained low. Overall, more than 30,500 people have died and almost 300,000 have been infected in France.

A number of European countries are seeing a surge in new cases, and Germany is also planning tighter rules.

Chancellor Angela Merkel warned on Friday that in the coming months things would become "even more difficult than now", as people have been able to enjoy life outdoors over the summer.

Masks for Paris

The French prime minister said all pedestrians would have to wear face masks in public areas in the capital from 08:00 on Friday (06:00 GMT).

While individual streets and areas of the capital already have rules on wearing face coverings, this new rule will be far more extensive, covering not only Paris but its inner ring of Seine-Saint-Denis, Hauts-de-Seine and Val-de-Marne.

Mask-wearing has taken over the streets of Paris by stealth over the past few months, and the blanket enforcement of face masks in and around the capital from 08:00 triggered little real outcry, except for one thing: the new rules were originally designed to apply to cyclists and runners, along with pedestrians.

By the time the regulation came into force this morning, Paris city hall had intervened, and won a reprieve, saying it was "dangerous" and "counter-productive" to force these two groups to wear masks, especially when the mayor had been encouraging people to cycle to work to relieve pressure on public transport.

Runners and cyclists aside, only a handful of people were still out without a mask in my neighbourhood this morning, and there seems to be a lot of support for the measure around the capital. "It's better than being locked down," one woman said. Another resident

said the government should have brought it in earlier, so that "the situation wouldn't have got as bad as it is now".
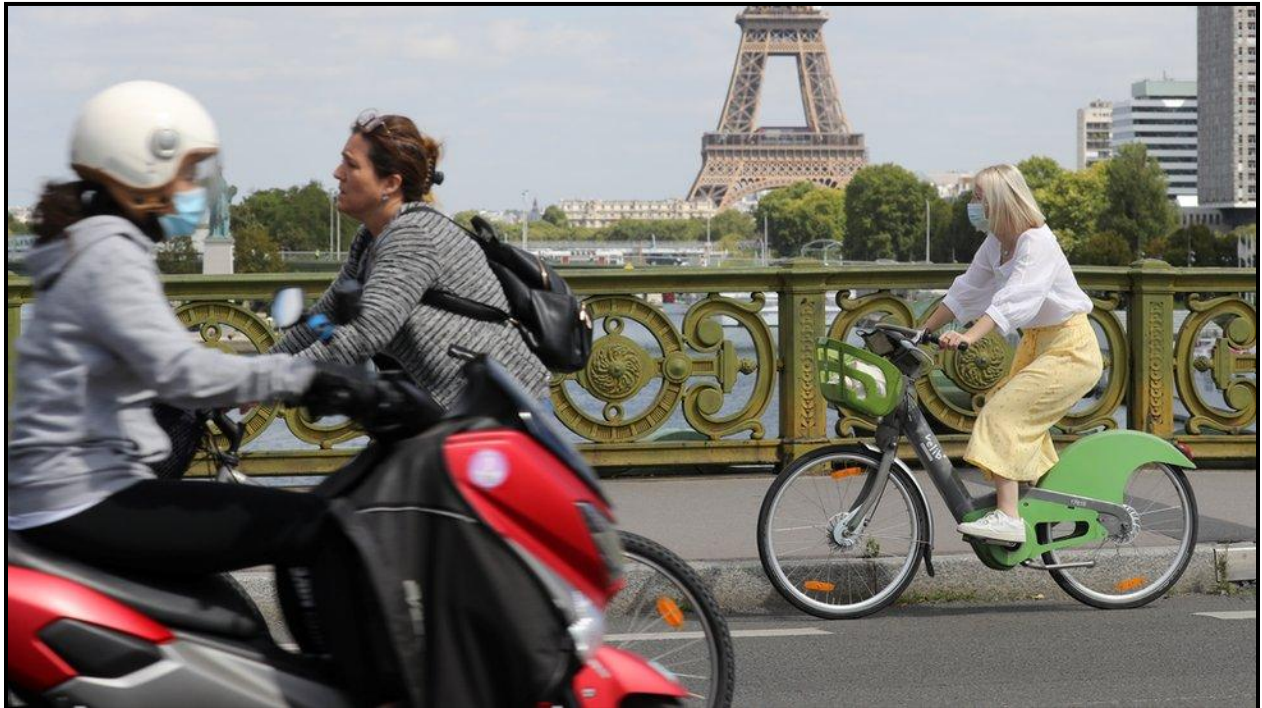
While cyclists have been given a reprieve, the rules still stand for motorcyclists and people on scooters

Asked on Friday if smokers could take off the mask to have a cigarette, Paris Deputy Mayor Anne Souyris made clear this was not the case. "You're not allowed to smoke on the street without a mask; you can't take it off, so you must find another way," she told the Cnews channel.

Paris is already a red zone, along with the southern area of Bouches-du-Rhône, where France's second-largest city Marseille made masks compulsory from Wednesday evening. A broad expanse of the Mediterranean coast and the Gironde area around Bordeaux are also red zones.

Masks will also become part of normal life for French schoolchildren aged 11 and over. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended use of masks in school from the age of 12.

Masks are already required in most enclosed public spaces and will be mandatory in workplaces from next week. However, the two biggest cities in the Netherlands have decided to scrap a pilot scheme for compulsory masks in their busiest areas on Monday.

The Amsterdam and Rotterdam authorities say they may bring back the requirement if necessary, but they believe that as the warm weather and high tourist season come to an end it will be easier to maintain social distancing of 1.5m (5ft).

What has Germany decided?

Masks are a key part of Germany's tougher restrictions aimed at curbing a renewed rise in cases. Although Germany has not seen the scale of Covid-related deaths as many other Western European countries, the federal government and 16 states have reached a deal on new measures:

A minimum €50 (£45) fine will be slapped on anyone breaking rules on face coverings - in shops, public transport or elsewhere; Lower Saxony in the north-west will not impose fines but Bavaria in the south will set higher penalties

Big events will be banned until the end of the year, although regions will be exempt if they have a low infection rate and participants are limited to those areas

A working group will be set up to discuss Bundesliga football matches, but no spectators will be allowed in until at least the end of October

There will be an end to free tests for holidaymakers returning from high-risk countries after 15 September. Travellers already have to self-isolate for 14 days. Bavaria will continue free testing until 1 October.

During her summer press conference on Friday, Mrs Merkel said Germans would "have to live with this virus for longer" and maintain vigilance, especially as the number of infections had risen in recent weeks. Another 1,571 cases and three more deaths were reported on Friday.

Meanwhile, a group called "Querdenken" (Think outside the box) is challenging a Berlin ban on a march on Saturday against Covid-19 restrictions. The protest has already seen 22,000 people sign up. A march on 1 August attracted around 20,000 people, made up of mainly Covid-deniers and far-right activists.

20.13 Portugal may go back on UK's quarantine list as Covid cases pass threshold

Source: theguardian.com,31 August,2020

Country was added to safe travel list just over a week ago but fresh restrictions are now likely

Tour guides await customers in Lisbon, Portugal. Last year, UK travellers made more than 2.5m visits to the country

British travellers may once again have to quarantine when returning from Portugal amid a rise in its Covid-19 cases to levels considered dangerous – just over a week after the country was added to the UK's safe travel list.

There were 21.1 coronavirus cases per 100,000 people in Portugal in the seven days to 30 August, up from 19.4 in the seven days to 29 August.

That is over the threshold seven-day rate of 20 per 100,000, above which the UK government considers triggering quarantine conditions requiring those returning to self-isolate for 14 days.

A decision is not expected until Thursday at the earliest and exceeding the figure does not automatically trigger the imposition of quarantine restrictions.

The boss of British Airways' parent company warned the move would cause further misery for holidaymakers. Writing in The Times, Willie Walsh, chief executive of International Airlines Group, said: "Another U-turn by the government, adding Portugal to the quarantine list, will cause further chaos and hardship for travellers."

He said the "ever-shifting list" of countries requiring quarantine means "the UK has officially hung up the 'Closed' sign", accusing the government of "using arbitrary statistics to effectively ban 160 countries and in the process destroying the economy'".

A source at the Department for Transport said: "Decisions around which countries are added or removed to the list are based on the joint biosecurity centre coronavirus risk assessment, which is informed by a number of factors, including the continued increase of coronavirus within a country and the numbers of new cases and potential trajectory of the disease in the coming weeks."

The travel corridor list is reviewed each Thursday, ahead of the weekend when the revised conditions come into force. The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland usually follow the UK government's lead, with some recent exceptions.

Last year, UK travellers made more than 2.5m visits to Portugal. Searches for flights to Portugal soared after the country was removed from the UK's quarantine list just over a week ago.

Paul Charles, a spokesman for the Quash Quarantine group, pointed out that many English and Welsh holidaymakers would be heading home this week anyway because of the start of the school term.

Passengers arriving in the UK from Portugal no longer had to self-isolate from 4am on Saturday 22 August after an approved travel corridor was confirmed.

Google search data showed a significant rise in searches for the term "flights to Portugal" by users in the UK at around 6pm on Thursday 20 August, the day the news about the quarantine change was announced.

A number of easyJet flights from London airports to destinations across Portugal on the weekend of Saturday 22 August were already unavailable on the Friday.

Jet2 was among the airlines aiming to capitalise on the rush, adding extra seats to Faro from Monday 24 August from across the UK.

Travellers returning from Switzerland, Jamaica and the Czech Republic were the latest to be told they must quarantine for 14 days if they were arriving in the UK after 4am on Saturday following rises in coronavirus infection rates.

Portugal was initially excluded from England's quarantine-free list when the full list of air bridge destinations was announced in July.

The government's decision not to include Portugal on that list was thought to be linked to a rise in coronavirus cases in the capital Lisbon.

SEPTEMBER 2020

21.1 Covid-19 vaccine tracker, Sept 3: The US could have a shot by early November

Source: indianexpress.com,3 September,2020

US President Donald Trump exits after a news conference at the White House. Trump has assured Americans that a vaccine for Covid-19 would be available by the year-end

Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine tracker September 3 Update: Dr Anthony Fauci also seems to be getting around the view that an early introduction of vaccine was possible, and in the interests of the people.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccine Tracker: It is now looking extremely likely that the United States would indeed have a novel coronavirus vaccine by November, if not earlier. According to a report in The New York Times, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has told public health officials all over the country to be prepared for a vaccination programme for targeted groups "as soon as late October or early November".

None of the vaccines being developed are likely to be ready by that time. The most advanced ones are in phase-3 clinical trials, which are expected to continue till the end of this year. Vaccine developers, scientists and experts have been maintaining that the earliest a vaccine can be made available is next year

However, US President Donald Trump has assured Americans that a vaccine would be available in the country by the year-end.

He has also not ruled out the possibility of the vaccine appearing even before the November 3 Presidential election, in which he is running to get elected for the second time. The availability of coronavirus vaccine is seen as boosting his chances of re-election.

While concerns are being raised, including by the World Health Organisation, about premature introduction of a vaccine, it seems all the relevant institutions in the United States are falling in line, and preparing the ground for approving a vaccine candidate for emergency use, even before the phase-3 trials are completed.

The Food and Drug Administration, country's drug regulator who Trump, just a few days ago, accused of deliberately delaying the approval process for a coronavirus vaccine, has said it was open to granting emergency use authorisation to a vaccine, even before the clinical trials were over, if the initial data was favourable.

Dr Stephen Hahn, FDA commissioner, has said in multiple interviews that it was up to the vaccine developers to make an application for an early approval.

And if they did, the FDA would not reject it just on the grounds that phase-3 trials were still continuing and not yet over.

Hahn, however, has been emphasising that the decision to grant emergency approval would be based on science and data, and not on political considerations.

Dr Anthony Fauci, America's most famous expert on coronavirus who has repeatedly said he expected a vaccine to be ready only by early next year, also seems to be getting around the view that an early introduction of vaccine was possible, and in the interests of the people.

In several interviews in the last couple of days, Fauci has been saying that if early data from phase-3 trials were promising enough, the vaccine can be cleared for emergency use on high-risk groups like health workers.

Fauci has been very critical of Russian and Chinese efforts to introduce a vaccine before phase-3 trials were over, but his backing could lend legitimacy to American attempts at doing the same thing.

The directive from the CDC to health workers to remain prepared is the latest in the string of efforts being made to prepare the ground for an early introduction of coronavirus vaccine in America, possibly even before the November 3 elections.

Dr Anthony Fauci, America's most famous expert on coronavirus

At least seven vaccine candidates are currently undergoing phase-3 human trials. These include the one being developed by Oxford University in collaboration with AstraZeneca, Moderna, and Pfiizer.

21.2 Why is it that while Covid-19 cases are rising, deaths continue to fall?

Source: theguardian.com,6 September,2020

There is speculation that the age of those infected is playing a part, while social distancing is also having an impact

The government's Covid-19 dashboard shows cases have risen steadily from their lowest point on 1 July when the rolling seven-day average was down to 574. By 30 August it had more than doubled, to 1,402 a day.

Yet the death rate has declined steadily over the same period: from a rolling average of 37.4 per day to 4.6 per day. No one is sure why. But here are some explanations researchers are examining:
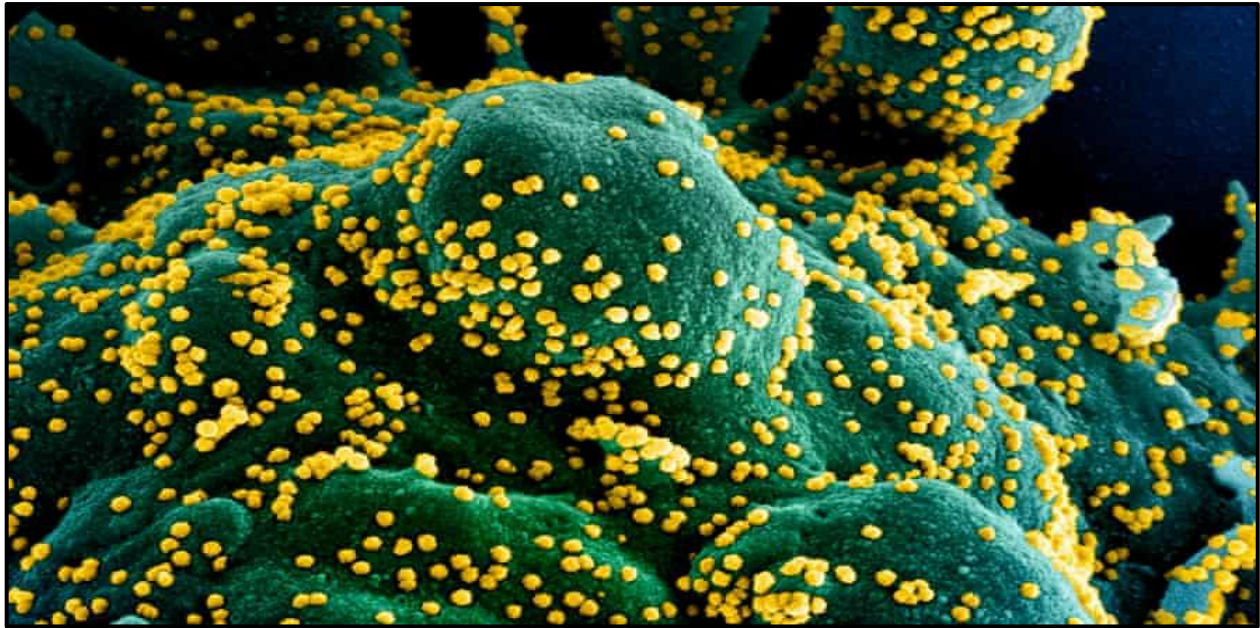
There is evidence the coronavirus is evolving, but no proof yet it is becoming less dangerous

Are new patients less likely to die because they are younger?

More than two-thirds of new cases in the last week of August were people under 40, according to Public Health England, a figure which is likely to be linked to looser rules on socialising. At the peak of the pandemic, only 28% of cases were younger than 40.

The risk of dying from Covid-19 doubles at roughly every six years of age, according to professor David Spiegelhalter, so the 2,042 people in their 20s who caught Covid-19 in the last week of August were unlikely to need treatment.

Are vulnerable people still shielding?

Far fewer people over 70 tested positive for Covid-19, according to the PHE data – 374 in the last week of August, compared with 10,770 in the first week of April.

People in this age group are likely to remain at risk of becoming seriously ill if they become infected.

However, most of them are taking care not to, or are being protected, according to Dr Veena Raleigh, a senior fellow at the King's Fund, an independent charitable healthcare body.

Do hospitals have better treatments?

Researchers at Oxford have published analysis showing that people with the virus in June were four times less likely to die in hospital than in April.

There are several factors playing a part: doctors switched from ventilators, which pump oxygen directly into the lungs with a tube, to using non-invasive devices such as CPAP. Infection control improved as hospitals created Covid-19 wards, and hospitals are quieter, reducing pressure on clinicians. The steroids dexamethasone and hydrocortisone both also improve chances of recovery by calming the body's immune response.

Does more testing mean more mild cases are discovered?

In March and April, testing was limited almost entirely to hospital patients and staff. The lacuna of community transmission has slowly been filled by an increase in "Pillar Two" drive-through and walk-in testing sites, and nearly 90% of new cases are identified this way, PHE figures show.

Prof Carl Heneghan at Oxford's Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine also says tests may be too sensitive and detect small amounts of virus in those who recovered weeks before.

Do social distancing measures mean viral loads are lower?

There may be a link between social distancing and viral load – the amount of virus present in a body. Some research shows that wearing masks and keeping away from other people reduces the amount of virus they are exposed to. And a Lancet study found that the amount of virus present when a patient was tested did predict how likely patients were to die.

Has vitamin D from sunshine helped?

Some researchers have suggested a link between vitamin D deficiency and Covid-19 death rates, and people have advocated the vitamin as a treatment for respiratory diseases for nearly a century. A study by the University of Chicago last week showed people with vitamin D deficiency were almost twice as likely to test positive for the virus as those with healthy levels. However, transmission rates soared during summer in the US, so any broader health impact seems limited.

Are there fewer vulnerable people left?

So far at least 21,775 of those who died in the UK were care home residents. Yet the total care home population alone is 330,000 and another 350,000 receive care at home. So there are still large numbers at a higher risk of serious illness.

Are we starting to see herd immunity?

Antibody testing studies have estimated that about 13% to 17% of Londoners have had the virus, a much higher figure than seen elsewhere in the UK, but much lower than the 70% that is assumed as the lowest level to be needed to achieve herd immunity. Immunity for other respiratory coronaviruses such as the common cold can last for months but then fades, so there is no guarantee that those who have been infected can brush off Covid-19 for ever. Herd immunity ought to lead to fewer people becoming infected, rather than less serious effects of infection.

Is Covid-19 getting weaker?

Geneticists have discovered that there is some evidence Covid-19 is evolving, but so far there does not seem to be any solid evidence that it is becoming less dangerous – or, thankfully, more deadly either.

21.3 Russia releases first batch of Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V into public

Source: hindustantimes.com,8 September,2020

The Russian health ministry registered the first vaccine against Covid-19, named Sputnik V, on August 11.

A staff member places a coronavirus vaccine candidate from Sinovac Biotech Ltd at its booth for display during the 2020 China International Fair for Trade in Services

The first batch of the Sputnik V vaccine against Covid-19, developed by Russia's Gamaleya National Research Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology and the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) has been released into civil circulation, regional deliveries are planned in the nearest future, the Russian health ministry informs. "The first batch of the 'Gam-COVID-Vac' [Sputnik V] vaccine for the prevention of the new coronavirus infection, developed by the Gamaleya National Research Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology of the Ministry of Health of Russia, has passed the necessary quality tests in the laboratories of Roszdravnadzor [medical device regulator] and has been released into civil circulation," the ministry said in a statement. The Russian health ministry registered the first vaccine against Covid-19, named Sputnik V, on August 11.Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyanin expressed hope on Sunday that the majority of the Russian capital's residents would be vaccinated against the coronavirus within several months.According to the health ministry, the delivery of the first batches of the Russian vaccine to the country's regions is planned in the nearest future.

21.4 Whatever Happened To ... The Instant Hospitals Built For COVID-19 Patients In Wuhan?

Source:npr.org,10 September,2020

On Jan. 23, workers started building the Huoshenshan hospital for COVID-19 patients in Wuhan, China. The photo above was taken on Jan. 30. Construction was done on Feb. 2, and the 1,000-bed hospital opened on Feb. 3. Today it stands empty of patients.

In February, China pulled off an impressive construction feat that caught the world's attention: Amid surging cases of COVID-19, China built two hospitals in the pandemic's epicenter, Wuhan, in under two weeks to isolate and treat COVID-19 patients.

Consisting largely of prefabricated rooms and components, the two-story structures were dubbed "instant hospitals." NPR reported on the facilities just as the first one opened. But now the virus is under control in Wuhan, and life has more or less returned to normal. So, what happened to these "instant hospitals?"

The 1,000-bed Huoshenshan Hospital (meaning Fire God Mountain) opened its doors on Feb. 3. Five days later, its sister hospital, Leishenshan (meaning Thunder God Mountain), opened with another 1,500 beds. Although some reports indicate Leishenshan was slower to fill up than Huoshenshan, according to Chinese state media, it was soon operating at near full capacity as well.

"Most news that came out about [these hospitals] was state-run news by China, so there's little information on how effective they actually were, because there's a propensity to publicize only the better side of the news," says Raymond Pan, the design principal at HMC Architects. In 2011, Pan won an award for his design of Shunde Hospital of Southern Medical University in China, located where the first outbreak of SARS happened in 2003. At the request of Chinese health officials, his design allows the hospital to easily isolate any part of the hospital in the event of an infectious disease outbreak.

Huoshenshan and Leishenshan were among 40 hospitals in Wuhan designated for serious and critical care for COVID-19 patients. Sixteen other makeshift hospitals were set up in converted gyms, convention and exhibition centers to isolate and treat mild cases, so those patients would not infect their families.

The vigorous efforts seem to have worked, because just a month later, on March 10, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that the disease had been "basically curbed" in Wuhan and its province, Hubei. That day, the 16 makeshift hospitals were all shut down.

Huoshenshan and Leishenshan continued operating for another month, after which they sent their final batch of patients to regular hospitals and were officially sealed off and "retired" on April 15.

According to state media, Leishenshan ended up treating a total of 2,011 patients over the two months it was operational. Government officials say there are no plans to demolish the hospitals yet, and they can be "reactivated at any time" if a second wave of infections hits.

A temporary hospital set up in an exhibition center in Wuhan, China, on Feb. 18. The hospital, one of the dozen of its kind in Wuhan, hosts COVID-19 patients with mild symptoms.

"Although the health workers [in these two field hospitals] have returned to their workplaces, the equipment and facilities are still there so that if needed, the workers can be mobilized again and the hospital can be reopened," says Yanzhong Huang, a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations.

What happens after the pandemic is still unclear, but if the hospitals' predecessor is any indication, not much.

During the 2003 SARS outbreak, China built Xiaotangshan Hospital on the outskirts of Beijing in just seven days out of prefabricated components. That hospital is what inspired the "instant hospitals" in Wuhan.

According to Huang and state media, Xiaotangshan — like the two in Wuhan — was never meant to be a fully functioning hospital. Rather, it was built as a temporary field hospital that wasn't supposed to last more than three years. During the outbreak, it admitted one-seventh of the country's SARS patients over roughly two months — an estimated 700 individuals. And then, it sat abandoned.

In 2010, the government announced that the facility would be demolished, but apparently, it wasn't "completely demolished," because in January 2020, renovations began to

revitalize Xiaotangshan for COVID-19 patients. Again, its service period didn't last long — only one and a half months. By April 29, the hospital was once again closed.

"If there was any negative impact [of the abandoned hospital sitting there for 17 years], it wasn't publicized," says Pan, but he has concerns. "Once a building deteriorates, there are environmental concerns," he says, such as pollution as pieces of the building fall apart or possible medical waste that can contaminate drinking, surface and ground waters if the building isn't properly cleaned and sanitized.

Huang says there were no reports of any medical waste leakage or health hazards while the SARS hospital sat abandoned. "To my knowledge, they have also sterilized [Huoshenshan and Leishenshan] to make sure there's no [medical waste] leakage, so I guess I have to trust their capability to not make this another health hazard," he says.

From an urban planning perspective, too, Pan says the hospitals occupy strategic locations within Wuhan, so if the hospitals are abandoned, it'll be a missed opportunity to do something valuable with the sites. If the buildings aren't demolished, he'd like to see them converted into other uses — perhaps a rehab facility or even a museum. "But the obstacle is: How well was it built to be able to withstand longer-term use and conversion?" says Pan.

Many have also asked whether the "instant hospital" model can be adopted by other countries to fight the pandemic. Although prefabricated hospitals are gaining popularity, Pan says no one besides China has the resources or cost-effective labor to follow suit. It would be "prohibitively expensive" for any other country, he says.

Instead, the makeshift hospitals that were converted from existing large buildings have already been adopted by others. On Aug. 1, Hong Kong opened its first makeshift hospital at a convention center. Meanwhile, the U.S. has installed numerous "pop-up" medical facilities in convention centers, parking garages, stadiums, among other venues.

"These [makeshift hospitals] were very effective in treating patients [in China], especially mild cases," says Huang. "They prevented infections that would have happened if those patients had been sent home to crowded living situations."

21.5 China says no need to vaccinate entire population against Covid-19 at this stage, only frontline workers

Source: edition.cnn.com,15 September,2020

(CNN)Not everyone in China will need to get vaccinated against Covid-19, according to the country's top medical official, as Beijing looks to prioritize frontline workers and high-risk

populations in a move that underscores rising confidence among policy-makers of their ability to contain the virus.

"Since the first wave of Covid-19 appeared in Wuhan, China has already survived the impact of Covid-19 several times," Gao Fu, director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said at a vaccine summit in the city of Shenzhen on Saturday, according to state-run news agency China News Service.

The question of vaccinating the public was one of balancing "risks and benefits," he added, pointing to factors like cost and potential side effects. There isn't currently a need for mass vaccination at this stage -- though that could change if another serious outbreak takes place, Gao said.

The policy marks China apart from many Western governments, most notably Australia, that have outlined plans to introduce mass public vaccination drives.

China's reported virus numbers have stayed low since the spring. There have been a few flare-ups -- clusters in the northeastern Jilin province in May, an outbreak in Beijing in June, and another in the Xinjiang capital of Urumqi in July -- but these were met with immediate lockdown measures and mass testing, and the outbreaks were contained within a few weeks.

Gao cited these brief outbreaks as evidence of China's effective containment measures. "The facts have proven that we have several magic weapons to respond to the epidemic," he said, according to China News Service.

Any potential vaccine would instead be prioritized for those on the front lines, he added: medical workers, Chinese nationals working overseas in virus hostpots, and people working in dense, high-risk environments like restaurants, schools or cleaning services.

On Saturday, China's National Health Commission only recorded 10 new symptomatic confirmed cases, all imported from overseas. It also reported 70 new asymptomatic cases, which are counted separately, also all imported.

CNN has reached out to the NHC for further comment.

Global race for a vaccine

Despite Gao's comments, China has been one of the biggest players in the global race to develop a coronavirus vaccine.

China is the world's largest producer and consumer of vaccines, and can supply more than 1 billion doses of a vaccine annually from 40 manufacturers across the country, according to the 2018-2022 China Human Vaccine Industry Report.

Of the more than 30 vaccines currently in human trials globally, nine are from China -- the most from any country. And four of the nine vaccine candidates in late-stage trials are being developed by Chinese companies.

Just last week, the University of Hong Kong announced that clinical trials have been approved for a nasal spray vaccine, developed in collaboration with mainland Chinese researchers.

Stages of vaccine development

A vaccine must go through multiple stages before being green lit for use. An initial research and development stage is followed by a series of pre-clinical and clinical trials. Typically each step can take two years or more to complete.

Pre-clinical	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Implementation
Vaccine tested on animals to assess safety and see if it triggers an immune response.	It's given to a small group of people, usually between 10-50.	It's tested on several hundred people to further check safety, side effects, immune response and dosage.	In this stage, it's given to thousands to determine whether it's effective and to monitor safety.	Regulators review the results to decide whether to approve the vaccine for use, licensing and manufacturing.

China has already pushed forward some vaccines before their efficacy has been fully proven. In late June, the country approved an experimental vaccine for use by its military. And since July, China has been using a different experimental vaccine on people who work in "high risk" jobs like medical professionals and border agents. Neither vaccine has completed Phase 3 trials.

Other countries may follow suit; the Indian health minister said on Sunday that the government was considering granting emergency authorization to Covid-19 vaccine candidates before the completion of Phase 3 trials.

Gao himself was injected with an experimental vaccine in July, in a move that was "intended to enhance the public's confidence in vaccines," according to state-run tabloid Global Times.

Experts have previously said that vaccination is key for countries like China, where the percentage of infected people within the population is relatively low due to strict containment measures.

"The overall immunity is very low. And so in these places, definitely the way forward is vaccinations," said Ivan Hung, an infectious diseases specialist at the Hong Kong University School of Medicine, in late August.

But Gao warned on Saturday that vaccine development is still a work in progress, with risks of poor side-effects.

"Since there has never been a Covid-19 vaccine developed before, which makes this case the very first in science, it is possible that it may induce ADE (antibody-dependent enhancement) effects as any other firsts we will possibly face," he said, according to Global Times.

ADE is when specific antibodies help a virus to enter cells and replicate -- basically, when a treatment makes the disease worse.

"Scientific research is a very rigorous process, we need to give scientists a bit more time," he added.

21.6 Researchers find coronavirus was circulating in Italy earlier than thought

Source: reuters.com,16 September,2020

ROME (Reuters) - The new coronavirus was circulating in Italy in September 2019, a study by the National Cancer Institute (INT) of the Italian city of Milan shows, signaling that it might have spread beyond China earlier than thought.

The World Health Organization has said the new coronavirus and COVID-19, the respiratory disease it causes, were unknown before the outbreak was reported in Wuhan, central China, late last year. But it has said "the possibility that the virus may have silently circulated elsewhere cannot be ruled out."

The WHO said on Monday it was reviewing the results from Italy and additional information published there at the weekend and was seeking clarification.

Italy's first COVID-19 patient was detected on Feb. 21 in a small town near Milan, in the northern region of Lombardy.

The Italian researchers' findings, published by the INT's scientific magazine Tumori Journal, show 11.6% of 959 healthy volunteers enrolled in a lung cancer screening trial between September 2019 and March 2020 had developed coronavirus antibodies well before February.

People wearing protective masks walk in the street as the region of Campania becomes a 'red zone', as part of tougher measures to tackle the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Naples, Italy November 16, 2020. REUTERS/Ciro De Luca

A further SARS-CoV-2 antibodies test was carried out by the University of Siena for the same research titled "Unexpected detection of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in the pre-pandemic period in Italy".

It showed that four cases dating back to the first week of October were positive for antibodies, meaning they had got infected in September, Giovanni Apolone, a co-author of the study, told Reuters.

"This is the main finding: people with no symptoms not only were positive after the serological tests but also had antibodies able to kill the virus," Apolone said.

"It means that the new coronavirus can circulate among the population for a long time and with a low rate of lethality, not because it is disappearing, only to surge again," he said. The WHO said it would contact the paper's authors "to discuss and arrange for further analyses of available samples and verification of the neutralization results". Italian researchers told Reuters in March that they reported a higher than usual number of cases of severe pneumonia and flu in Lombardy in the last quarter of 2019 in a sign that the new coronavirus might have circulated earlier than thought.

21.7 WHO says Covid-19 situation in Europe 'very serious'. Second lockdown in UK?

Source: hindustantimes.com, 18 September, 2020

With restricted number of international planes flying between India and several European countries, the situation is worrying for India too.

In August, protesters in London too out a demonstration against the lockdown and use of face masks, amid the Covid-19 outbreak

After World Health Organization expressed concerns over the accelerating number of cases in Europe, the UK government said it is mulling a 'short period' of tighter restrictions likely to be announced next week.

Here is all you need to know about the second wave of Covid-19 in Europe

* More than half of European countries have reported more than 10 per cent increase in cases in the past two weeks.

* WHO's regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, said, "We have a very serious situation unfolding before us."

* Weekly cases have now exceeded the March numbers when Covid-19 was in a peak in Europe.

* This is a wake-up call for all of us, Hans Kluge has said.

* On Wednesday, France reported 9,874 cases — highest daily cases reported so far in France.

* The second wave is being seen as a direct result of resuming several activities across Europe, including the resumption of schools.

21.8 Saudi Arabia bans flights to and from India due to COVID-19 outbreak

Source: nationalheraldindia.com,23 September,2020

Saudi Arabia has banned flights to and from India from Tuesday amid a surge in coronavirus cases, according to an official document

Saudi Arabia has banned flights to and from India from Tuesday amid a surge in coronavirus cases, according to an official document.

In a circular issued on Tuesday, Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) said it was "suspending travel to and from the following countries: (India, Brazil and Argentina) including any person who has been in any of the mentioned countries above in the last 14 days prior to their arrival to the Kingdom".

However, it excluded "passengers who have official government invitations.

The GACA circular -- titled: Suspension of travel to countries where the COVID-19 virus has outbreak' -- was marked to all the airlines and chartered flight companies operating at Saudi Arabia's airports.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE host a significant Indian migrant population.

Five days back, Air India Express had said the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA) suspended its flights for 24 hours for bringing two passengers with COVID-positive certificates on August 28 and September 4.

Dubai is the most populous city of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Scheduled international passenger flights have been suspended in India since March 23 due to the outbreak. However, special international flights have been operating between India and Saudi Arabia since May 6 under the Vande Bharat mission.

India's COVID-19 caseload has reached 56,46,010, and the death toll has climbed to 90,020 with 1,085 people succumbing to the disease in the past 24 hours, the Health Ministry's data updated at 8 am Wednesday showed.

After one-day suspension for bringing passengers with COVID-positive certificates, Air India Express resumed its Dubai flights on Saturday.

According to rules of the UAE government, every passenger travelling from India is required to bring an original COVID-negative certificate of an RT-PCR test done within 96 hours prior to the journey.

Hong Kong has banned Air India flights from Sunday to October 3 after a few passengers on its flight on Friday tested positive for COVID-19 post arrival, a senior government official said on Sunday.

Air India passenger flights were barred from landing in Hong Kong between August 18 and August 31 after 14 passengers on its Delhi-Hong Kong flight of August 14 tested positive for COVID-19 post arrival.

21.9 Moscow ramps up COVID hospitals to handle 'big second wave': sources

Source:thechronicleherald.ca,25 September,2020

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Moscow hospitals have been instructed to free up hundreds of beds for COVID-19 patients in response to a sharp acceleration in case numbers, four medical sources told Reuters, as the city's mayor urged workers and the elderly to stay at home.

Dozens of hospitals in the Russian capital were designated as special coronavirus centres when the pandemic struck in March but returned to treating other patients as it ebbed over the summer. Now some are reverting to COVID-only mode or partially reopening for COVID, the sources said.

"This is a really big second wave," a medic at the Kommunarka hospital, one of Moscow's main coronavirus centres, told Reuters.

After the highest number of coronavirus patients since the start of the outbreak were admitted to the hospital on Thursday, it was working at 120% of normal capacity, the source said.

Across Russia, officials reported 7,212 new infections on Friday, bringing the national case total to 1,136,048 - the fourth highest in the world behind the United States, India and Brazil. In Moscow, new cases rose almost 50% overnight to 1,560 from 1,050 the previous day.

Russia lifted many of its lockdown restrictions in June and many shops, businesses and public transport in the capital of more than 12.5 million people are operating largely as normal.

On Friday, however, Mayor Sergei Sobyanin recommended that the heads of all companies in the city switch as many of their staff as possible to working from home from Monday.

NO-MASK FINES

TsUM, Moscow's flagship luxury goods department store, was fined 1 million roubles ($13,000) for failing to make its visitors wear masks, the city's coronavirus taskforce said.

It said raids to check for mandatory mask-wearing in shops were continuing and that more than 15,000 fines had been issued.

Sobyanin advised anyone with chronic health problems or those older than 65 to stay at home except in urgent circumstances. Any pension-age working Muscovites should work from home or take holiday, he said.

Another key Moscow coronavirus clinic, Hospital Number 52, was 98% full as of Thursday night, one of its employees told Reuters, and there were no free intensive care beds.

The hospital only recently reopened one of its sections for non-coronavirus patients but was ordered to return fully to treating coronavirus by Monday.

The upsurge in Moscow has escalated since Russia reopened schools on Sept. 1. The number of new daily infections has more than doubled compared to late August.

At least two more Moscow clinics, the Inosemtsev Hospital and Hospital Number 50, are returning to treating coronavirus patients, three sources told Reuters.

"We were ordered to reopen for coronavirus over the weekend," a doctor at one of them said. He said other patients would still be treated there, however.

The two hospitals will offer more than 500 beds for coronavirus patients, according to a Moscow health department order seen by Reuters.

Deputy Moscow Mayor Anastasia Rakova said the extra demand across the capital was being met by using "reserve capacities" and observation facilities not normally used to treat patients.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia had no plan to reimpose severe lockdown restrictions, but urged people to "be much more careful and take care of yourself and your loved ones".

The national coronavirus taskforce said 108 people had died across Russia in the last 24 hours, pushing the official coronavirus death toll to 20,056. Russia has the world's 12th-highest death toll, according to the official figures.

21.10 How the global coronavirus pandemic unfolded

Source: livemint.com, 29 September,2020

Health workers collecting swab sample from a girl for COVID-19 testing in New Delhi on Tuesday

On Dec. 31 2019, China alerted the WHO of 27 cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan city

Here are some key developments as the novel coronavirus spread around the world:

Dec. 31, 2019: China alerts the World Health Organization of 27 cases of "viral pneumonia" in the central city of Wuhan. Authorities shut down a wet market in Wuhan the next day, after discovering some patients were vendors or dealers.

Jan. 11, 2020: A 61-year-old man is reported as the first death. Preliminary lab tests cited by Chinese state media point to a new type of coronavirus.

Jan. 13: A Chinese woman is quarantined in Thailand, the first detection of the virus outside China.

Jan. 15: Japan confirms its first case.

Jan. 20: South Korea confirms its first case.

Jan. 22: The WHO convenes an emergency meeting. Director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says the new coronavirus does not yet constitute an international emergency.

Jan. 23: China issues a lockdown for millions of people in Wuhan and Hubei province as the death toll rises to 18.

Jan. 24: The first cases in Europe are reported in France.

Jan. 25: China bans wildlife trade, and extends the Lunar New Year holiday for workers and schools. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announces measures to limit links with China.

Jan. 27: The United States warns against travel to China, a day after five people who had been in Wuhan become the first confirmed cases in America.

Jan. 30: The WHO declares the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern.

Feb. 1: The United States, Singapore, Russia and Australia ban foreign travelers who were recently in China.

Feb. 2: A 44-year-old man dies in the Philippines, the first death outside China.

Feb. 3: Investors erase $393 billion from China's benchmark stock index, selling the yuan and dumping commodities on the first day of trade after the Lunar New Year break.

Feb. 4: Hong Kong reports its first death. Macau shutters casinos. American Airlines Group and United Airlines Holdings Inc suspend flights to Hong Kong.

Feb. 5: About 3,700 passengers are quarantined aboard the Diamond Princess, a Carnival Corp cruise liner, off Japan. More than 700 passengers test positive and 14 die. The quarantine lasts nearly a month.

Feb. 7: Li Wenliang, a Chinese ophthalmologist who had been reprimanded for issuing an early warning about the Wuhan outbreak, dies, triggering wide public mourning and rare expressions of anger against the government.

Feb. 15: An elderly Chinese tourist hospitalized in France is the first fatality reported in Europe.

Feb. 19: A spike in infections in South Korea linked to a church congregation is declared a "super-spreading event." South Korea later seeks murder charges against leaders of the Shincheonji Church.

Feb. 22: Italy seals off its hard-hit northern regions of Lombardy and Veneto.

Feb. 25: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns Americans to begin preparing for the virus to spread, signaling a change in tone.

Feb. 26: The number of new infections inside China is overtaken by those elsewhere for the first time. Italy and Iran emerge as new epicenters.

Feb. 28: The S&P 500 suffers its biggest weekly drop since the 2008 financial crisis on fears of a global recession. More than $5 trillion is wiped from global market value.

March 1: Two deaths are reported at a nursing home near Seattle, thought to be the first in the United States at the time.

March 3: In a surprise move, the U.S. Federal Reserve cuts interest rates by half a percentage point to try to stem the economic damage. Markets continue to fall.

March 6: The number of infected people exceeds 100,000 globally. Deaths top 3,400.

March 9: Crude oil prices plunge 25%, the biggest daily rout since the 1991 Gulf War, as Saudi Arabia and Russia begin a price war.

March 10: "The whole of Italy is closed now," reads a headline in the Corriere della Sera newspaper after Rome imposes the most severe controls on a Western nation since World War Two.

March 11: The Bank of England slashes interest rates by half a percentage point. The British government unveils a budget splurge designed to stave off a recession.

March 12: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, 48, goes into quarantine for two weeks after his wife, Sophie, tests positive.

March 13: U.S. President Donald Trump declares a national emergency to free up $50 billion in federal aid.

March 14: France and Spain join Italy in imposing lockdowns on tens of millions of people, Australia orders foreign travelers to self-isolate, and other countries extend entry bans to try to stop the spreading virus.

March 17: Brazil reports its first death. The European Union bars outside travelers.

March 19: Italy's death toll overtakes China. Russia records its first death. The virus has spread to more than 170 countries.

March 20: California issues an unprecedented state-wide "stay at home order" and New York closes non-essential businesses.

March 24: The International Olympic Committee and Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announce the postponement of the 2020 Summer Games. India goes under lockdown.

March 25: A $2 trillion coronavirus aid package, dubbed "the largest rescue package in American history," is approved by Congress.

March 27: South Africa starts nationwide lockdown. Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other African countries try to ringfence cities.

April 2: Global cases shoot past 1 million as deaths soar in the United States and western Europe.

April 5: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, 55, is admitted to hospital with coronavirus after suffering a fever and cough. He is discharged on April 12.

April 7: Early data shows COVID-19 is killing African Americans at a higher rate than the general U.S. population, underscoring disparities in healthcare access.

April 8: Wuhan reopens. Its 11 million citizens can leave their homes for the first time in months.

April 10: Global deaths reaches 100,000 and confirmed cases exceed 1.6 million.

April 13: A handful of European countries begin to ease restrictions. Spain restarts construction and manufacturing, while Austria and Italy allow certain stores to reopen. Danish children can return to school.

April 14: Trump halts funding to the WHO over its handling of the pandemic, drawing condemnation from infectious disease experts.

April 23: Trump says scientists should explore whether injecting disinfectant might help COVID-19 patients, horrifying doctors who worry some people will poison themselves with bleach.

May 4: J. Crew Group Inc files for bankruptcy protection after temporary store closures cost it almost $900 million in sales. In the following weeks, Neiman Marcus Group and J.C. Penney Co Inc would also be pushed to the brink.

May 8: The U.S. economy lost 20.5 million jobs in April, the steepest plunge since the Great Depression. The unemployment rate surges to 14.7%.

May 9: Avianca Holdings, Latin America's second-largest airline, files for bankruptcy. It would be followed by LATAM Airlines Group, the continent's largest carrier, on May 26.

May 11: Thousands of visitors stream into Shanghai Disneyland, the first park reopened by Walt Disney Co.

May 13: The virus could become endemic like HIV and never go away, the WHO says.

May 14: The United Nations warns of a looming mental illness crisis as millions of people are surrounded by death and disease and forced into isolation, poverty and anxiety.

May 18: Trump says he is taking hydroxychloroquine as a preventive medicine despite medical warnings against the use of the malaria drug. Subsequent studies, including a large multi-country trial by the WHO, find little benefit to COVID-19 patients treated with the drug.

May 22: Brazil overtakes Russia to become the world No. 2 in cases.

May 25: George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American, dies after a police officer kneels on his neck for nearly 9 minutes. The incident triggers weeks of protests against racism and police brutality around the world, and health experts warn the demonstrations may help spread the virus.

May 29: Trump says he is terminating the U.S. relationship with the WHO over its handling of the outbreak, accusing the UN agency of becoming a puppet organization of China.

June 8: New Zealand lifts all social and economic restrictions except border controls, one of the first countries to return almost to pre-pandemic normality.

June 15: After 83 days of lockdown, England allows retail stores to reopen.

June 19: Cases in Brazil top 1 million and deaths approach 50,000, a new nadir for the world's second worst-hit country.

June 23: After more than 100 days of lockdown, New York City residents can get haircuts, shop at reopened stores and dine outdoor.

June 28: Global deaths exceed 500,000 and confirmed cases top 10 million.

July 4: England allows pubs, restaurants and hair salons to reopen. Spain's northeastern region of Catalonia reimposes restrictions.

July 6: India overtakes Russia to become the No. 3 country by infections, at nearly 700,000.

July 7: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro says he tested positive for the virus. The WHO acknowledges there is "evidence emerging" of airborne transmission, after previously saying most droplets expelled from the nose and mouth of an infected person quickly sink to the ground.

July 8: Australia's second-largest city, Melbourne, goes back into lockdown.

July 21: Trump, in a shift in rhetoric, encourages Americans to wear masks if they cannot maintain social distance and warns the pandemic will get worse before it gets better.

July 25: Britain imposes a two-week quarantine on travellers from Spain, throwing Europe's summer reopening into disarray.

Aug. 5: As the global death toll tops 700,000, the WHO says young people must curb their party instincts to help prevent new outbreaks.

Aug. 6: Trump says a vaccine is possible before the Nov. 3 election. Africa's cases surpass 1 million, with South Africa accounting for more than half.

Aug. 10: Brazil's death toll tops 100,000, continuing to climb as most cities reopen shops and dining.

Aug. 11: Russia becomes the first country to approve a COVID-19 vaccine, after less than two months of human testing.

Aug. 18: The S&P 500 index closes at a record 3,389.78 points, recovering completely from its February crash and underlining the disconnect between a rally driven by government stimulus spending and a recession-hit economy.

Sept. 2: COVID-19 infections in Europe are back to levels seen in March, the head of the EU's public health agency said.

Sept. 7: India overtakes Brazil as the second-worst hit country, with more than 4.2 million cases.

Sept. 6: AstraZeneca suspends late-stage trials of its experimental vaccine due to serious side effects in a participant, casting doubts for an early rollout. Trials in Britain resume less than a week later.

Sept. 18: European countries from Denmark to Spain and Greece announce new restrictions after cases spike.

Sept. 22: Faced with fast-spreading infections, Britain tells people to work from home, and bars and restaurants to close early, but stops short of a full lockdown.

Sept. 23: Johnson & Johnson begins trial of a single-shot vaccine that, if proven effective, could simplify distribution. Rivals from Moderna Inc, Pfizer Inc and AstraZeneca all require two shots separated by several weeks.

Sept. 29: Global deaths exceed 1 million. Deaths from coronavirus-related illnesses have doubled from half a million in just three months, led by fatalities in the United States, Brazil and India.

OCTOBER 2020

22.1 Coronavirus: Spain orders Madrid lockdown as COVID-19 cases soar

Source: news.sky.com,1 October,2020

The regional government rejects the central government plan that imposes stricter mobility curbs and limits on social gatherings.

Residents in Madrid will be banned from leaving the city, except on essential trips, under strict new coronavirus restrictions imposed by the Spanish government.

Madrid has 735 cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people, one of the highest of any region in Europe and double the national rate.

But regional authorities said the decision had no legal basis, setting the stage for a political showdown in an area accounting for more than a third of Spain's 133,604 new cases in the past two weeks.

Under the new measures, the capital city's borders will be closed to outsiders for non-urgent visits. Another nine cities in the metropolitan area are also affected.

"Madrid's health is Spain's health. Madrid is special," Health Minister Salvador Illa told a news conference to announce the new regulations, which are due to come into force in the coming days. He did not say exactly when.

People will be allowed to cross municipal boundaries to go to work or school, visit the doctor or go shopping, but must remain within the city for leisure activities.

Other measures include the closure of bars and restaurants at 11pm, from a previous curfew of 1am, as well as the closure of public parks and playgrounds.

Social gatherings will be limited to six people.

The conservative regional assembly had already enforced localised lockdowns in 45, mostly poor districts, often with a high immigrant population.

But the new wider restrictions see the central government overriding the regional government after weeks of fighting between the two authorities over what should be done in the city.

A man gets his temperature checked in Vallecas, Madrid, which has already been under partial lockdown

"The decision is not valid legally," regional health chief Enrique Ruiz Escudero repeatedly told a news conference of the

lockdown plan, even though the local authorities had seemingly accepted some steps earlier this week.

"The Spanish government is in a hurry to intervene in Madrid but not to defeat the virus."

The fallout has taken the political polarisation that has characterised much of the response to the pandemic over the past months to new heights, exasperating communities.

Madrid's refusal to adopt national standards approved by 13 of Spain's 19 regions and autonomous cities represented a new setback for Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's left-wing coalition, which is trying to push for a stricter response in the opposition-ruled Spanish capital.

Spain has recorded a total of 769,188 cases, more than any other nation in Western Europe. The total death toll stands at 31,791.

"We must be conscious that there are tough weeks, very tough, ahead," Mr Illa said.

22.2 WHO says 10% of world's population likely affected by Covid-19, warns of difficulties ahead

Source: theprint.in,5 October,2020

This estimate would amount to more than 760 million people, outstripping number of confirmed cases tallied by both WHO & Johns Hopkins University, now more than 35 million worldwide.

A health worker wearing PPE kit collects sample from a woman for COVID-19 test, at Chanpora, in Srinagar, Thursday, Oct. 1, 2020

Geneva: The head of emergencies at the World Health Organization said Monday its best estimates indicate that roughly 1 in 10 people worldwide may have been infected by the coronavirus more than 20 times the number of confirmed cases and warned of a difficult period ahead.

Dr Michael Ryan, speaking to a special session of the WHO's 34-member executive board focusing on COVID-19, said the figures vary from urban to rural, and between different groups, but that ultimately it means the vast majority of the world remains at risk.

He said the pandemic would continue to evolve, but that tools exist to suppress transmission and save lives.

Many deaths have been averted and many more lives can be protected," Ryan said. He was flanked by his boss, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who minutes earlier led a moment of silence to honor victims as well as round of applause for the health workers who have strived to save them.

Ryan said southeast Asia faced a surge in cases, Europe and the eastern Mediterranean were seeing an increase in deaths, while the situations in Africa and the Western Pacific were rather more positive.

"Our current best estimates tell us that about 10 percent of the global population may have been infected by this virus, Ryan told attendees from member governments who make up the executive board and provide much of its funding.

The estimate which would amount to more than 760 million people based on a current world population of about 7.6 billion far outstrips the number of confirmed cases as tallied by both WHO and Johns Hopkins University, now more than 35 million worldwide.

Experts have long said that the number of confirmed cases greatly underestimates the true figure.

The comments came during a special session of the executive board to consider the follow-up to its previous meeting, in May, that passed a resolution to look into the world's and WHO's response to the pandemic. Ryan warned that the world was "now heading into a difficult period. The disease continues to spread. It is on the rise in many parts of the world.

22.3 Europe struggles to stem rapid resurgence of coronavirus

Source:theguardian.com,8 October,2020

Concern in Germany and maximum alert in France, as other countries report record infection rates.

Several mainland European countries have recorded their highest daily number of Covid-19 infections since widespread testing began, as governments struggle to stem a rapid resurgence of the virus that risks overwhelming some healthcare systems.

The figures came as the World Health Organization reported a record one-day increase in global coronavirus cases, with the total rising by 338,779 in 24 hours. The previous record for new cases was 330,340 on 2 October.

An empty carousel outside the town hall in Frankfurt, Germany, where an evening entertainment curfew has been imposed

As a region, Europe is now reporting more cases than India, Brazil or the United States.

From France to Portugal, Poland to the Netherlands, authorities across the continent are battling spiralling case numbers as contacts have multiplied since the end of strict national lockdowns in the spring and last month's return to schools, workplaces and hospitality venues.

Germany's leading public health body, the Robert Koch Institute, said on Thursday that the virus could start spreading uncontrollably after the number of new infections in the country leapt by almost half overnight to 4,000, a figure not seen since April. There are predictions that new cases could soon exceed 10,000 a day.

The health minister, Jens Spahn, who has won praise for his management of the pandemic so far – Germany has reported significantly fewer cases and a much lower death rate than most of the rest of Europe – said he was "very concerned", adding that the pandemic was a "character test for us as a society".

The capital, Berlin, and the financial hub of Frankfurt have already imposed a curfew on evening entertainment, and most of Germany's states have agreed that people who live in higher-risk areas should not be allowed to stay in hotels elsewhere.

Days after bars in Paris were closed for a fortnight, tighter restrictions were announced in four more cities as France reported a record 18,746 new infections. The proportion of test results that are positive has risen to 9.1%, from 4.5% a month ago.

The health minister, Olivier Véran, said Lille, Lyon, Grenoble and Saint-Étienne had joined Marseille and Paris on "maximum alert" and must close gyms, sports centres and bars, although restaurants could remain open. Infection levels in Toulouse and Montpellier were "worrying", and they could be subject to the same restrictions on Monday, he said.

The president, Emmanuel Macron, said: "In places where the virus is spreading too fast, especially among the elderly who are most at risk, and where there are more and more intensive care beds being occupied, we must proceed to more restrictions." He said the situation would not return to normal for several months.

The Paris regional health agency said on Thursday that 40% of intensive care beds in the capital and surrounding area were occupied by coronavirus patients, and it has told hospitals to put themselves on an emergency footing, mobilising extra doctors and postponing some operations.

"It means that we're going to have a huge wave of cases and we need to throw all our forces into the battle," said the agency's chief, Aurélien Rousseau.

In Spain, the squabbles and mixed messaging that have dogged efforts to tackle the virus in and around Madrid continued on Thursday. The capital and its surrounding area is battling a soaring infection rate of more than 700 cases per 100,000 people, compared with 300 per 100,000 in the rest of Spain, which is the highest national rate in the European Union.

Less than a week after the central government imposed a partial lockdown on the capital and nine nearby towns, a court in Madrid struck down the temporary measures, which had been opposed by the regional government.

Despite the verdict, the regional president, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, urged people to stay in the capital over the busy bank holiday weekend and to follow all the health recommendations.

Austria on Thursday recorded its highest one-day tally of infections, despite taking measures such as compulsory mask-wearing in recent weeks. The health ministry said 1,209 new cases had been recorded in 24 hours.

The country managed to escape the worst of the pandemic earlier in the year with a strict nationwide lockdown, but numbers have been rising steadily in recent weeks. The health

minister, Rudolf Anschober, rebuffed speculation that Austria might need a second lockdown, saying only 5% of intensive care beds were occupied.

Romania hit a record high of 3,130 new infections on Thursday, while Slovakia's daily tally rose to 1,037, the highest since the pandemic reached that country. "Let's all be extra-cautious, please," the prime minister, Igor Matovič, said on Facebook.

Poland's daily coronavirus cases surged by more than 40% from the previous day to 4,280, a new record, and doctors said the hospital system could soon face serious difficulties. The country reported 76 Covid-related deaths, also a new record.

The deputy health minister, Waldemar Kraska, said the capital, Warsaw, would be added to a list of areas with new restrictions, while the prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, said masks would become compulsory nationwide from Saturday.

The number of confirmed coronavirus infections in the Netherlands surged by more than 5,800 in 24 hours, increasing the pressure on authorities to impose new restrictions in the country with one of the highest per capita infection rates in the world.

Nearly 20,000 people have tested positive in the Netherlands since Monday, far exceeding the total for the whole of the month of August. Infections are up by more than 60% this week compared with last week, and hospital admissions have surged by 55%.

The exponential increase has prompted the Dutch health minister, Tamara van Ark, to ask for help from Germany. Ten German hospitals have agreed to set aside 44 intensive care beds for Dutch coronavirus patients.

Portugal on Thursday recorded more than 1,000 new daily cases for the first time since April. The health secretary, António Lacerda Sales, warned the country it must "prepare for what is coming".

Italy registered 4,458 new coronavirus infections, the first time it had exceeded 4,000 in a day since mid-April. New infections in Switzerland rose by 1,172 in a day, with the country's public health agency reporting a total of 58,881 confirmed cases. New daily cases peaked in Switzerland at 1,456 on 23 March and had reduced to as few as three in June. Sweden said it would postpone plans to let more people attend sporting events and concerts as infection numbers continued to rise. The government said in August it intended to raise the attendance limit for some events to 500 from the current 50.

"Sweden has left the low levels we saw during the summer," the minister for health and social affairs, Lena Hallengren, said. "Our assessment is that changes are not appropriate at this point."

Russia's health ministry advised citizens to stay at home this weekend after the country reported 11,493 new coronavirus cases on Thursday, just short of the most confirmed in a single day during the pandemic, pushing its overall total to 1,260,112.

22.4 Covid: UK at 'tipping point', top scientist warns

Source: bbc.com,11 October,2020

The UK has reached a "tipping point" in its coronavirus epidemic similar to that last seen in March, one of the country's top scientists has warned

England's deputy chief medical officer Prof Jonathan Van-Tam said the seasons were "against us" and the country was running into a "headwind". More deaths would follow a rise in cases over coming weeks, he said, and urged people to limit social contact.

On Monday, Boris Johnson is expected to announce tougher restrictions. In a statement to MPs, the prime minister is expected to set out plans for a three-tier local lockdown system which would see every region in England placed in one of three tiers, depending on the severity of cases.

Across the UK, the R number - the average number of people each infected person passes the virus onto - is now estimated between 1.2 and 1.5. Anything above 1.0 means cases are increasing.

On Saturday, 15,166 people in the UK were reported to have tested positive for coronavirus - up 1,302 on Friday's figure, according to the government's dashboard. There were a further 81 deaths - a decrease of six on Friday.

However, the Office for National Statistics estimates 224,000 people in homes in England had the virus, up to 1 October - roughly double the figure reported by the ONS for each of the preceding two weeks.

In his statement published on Sunday, Prof Van-Tam said that while the epidemic "re-started" again among younger people over the past few weeks, there is "clear evidence of a gradual spread into older age groups" in the worst-hit areas.

"Sadly, just as night follows day, increases in deaths will now follow on in the next few weeks," Prof Van-Tam said.

He warned that the UK was in a different position than during the first wave because "we are now are going into the colder, darker winter months".

"We are in the middle of a severe pandemic and the seasons are against us. Basically, we are running into a headwind," he said.

But he also said the UK has "much improved testing capabilities" and "better treatments" available, meaning that "we know where it is and how to tackle it".

He stressed the importance of following public health guidance and minimising contact with others, adding: "I know this is very hard, but it is an unfortunate scientific fact that the virus thrives on humans making social contact with one another."

It comes as the Labour Party and business groups voiced concern at the "ripple effect" of Covid shutdowns that are expected to be announced on Monday.

Labour claims that close to one million workers will be at risk because the chancellor's plan to pay staff at UK companies that are told to close 67% of their wages does not extend to those who may be indirectly affected, such as those in supply chains.

The Treasury denied firms that are not fully closed would not receive help.

A spokesperson said: "We do not recognise these figures," adding that Labour had "incorrectly" listed some sectors as not benefitting from the scheme.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson will set out the new rules for hotspots in the House of Commons on Monday.

Every region of England is expected to be placed in one of three tiers, with the Liverpool City Region thought to be in the category with the strictest rules.

Plans are not yet finalised, BBC political correspondent Chris Mason said, but that is likely to mean pubs will close, restaurants could face restrictions, people may even be told not to travel in and out of the area. Schools and universities would remain open.

Pubs and restaurants across the central belt of Scotland have closed for the last time in at least two weeks

More talks are expected on Sunday between the government and leaders in parts of England that are expecting new restrictions. Council leaders and mayors have expressed their anger at what they see as inadequate help for those who will no longer be able to work. Many regions are demanding more local control over contact tracing, while others have raised the possibility of legal action if they do not get the support they demand. The government says it is committed to involving local leaders in decision-making.

Discussions with Downing Street on Friday were described on Merseyside as "frosty," but "cordial and giving on both sides". Leaders in Greater Manchester do not yet have another meeting with the government arranged, Chris Mason added - but one is expected before the prime minister's statement on Monday.

In Nottingham, Newcastle, Sunderland, Leeds and elsewhere, leaders and residents await the announcement of the template for the next phase of the pandemic.

22.5 Romania on high alert amid alarming increase in coronavirus cases, imposes fresh Covid-19 restrictions from October 15

Source: hindustantimes.com,15 October,2020

Romania government extends the high alert regime in the country for a period of 30 days, starting from October 15, 2020, amid increase in the level of coronavirus cases

The Romanian authorities are extending the high alert mode due to the spread of COVID-19, and additional restrictions are being imposed in the country, the government said in a statement.

Earlier, the country's authorities reported 164,477 confirmed cases of the infection, with 5,601 deaths.

On May 15, the emergency situation regime ended in Romania, and the authorities announced a high alert mode to replace it. The latter was in effect until October 15.

"The government has decided to extend the high alert regime in the country for a period of 30 days, starting from October 15, 2020," as per the resolution, published on the Romanian cabinet's website.

The authorities are also introducing additional restrictive measures. In particular, if the level of coronavirus incidence in a locality exceeds three cases per 1,000 people, then local residents will have to wear masks not only in closed rooms, but also on the streets. It is forbidden to hold weddings, christenings, anniversaries and other feasts in closed spaces.

22.6 Coronavirus: new rules from Monday as cases rise fast in Switzerland

Source: lenews.ch,18 October,2020

On 18 October 2020, after an extraordinary meeting, Switzerland's Federal Council announced masks would become mandatory across all of Switzerland. In addition, certain gatherings of more than 15 people are to be banned and employers are required to follow recommendations for staff to work from home.

Since 19 June 2020, the governments of Switzerland's cantons have played the lead role in combating the COVID-19 epidemic. Today, the federal government decided to step back in after discussions with the cantons.

The rapid rise in coronavirus cases in the last few days is a cause for great concern, said the Federal Council. The number of cases is now rising across all age groups and across all cantons and more people being admitted to hospital.

The latest figure, reported on Friday 16 October 2020, showed 3,105 new cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection over 24 hours. At last count there were 567 Covid-19 patients in hospitals across Switzerland, according to FOPH figures published by RTS. During the first wave, hospitalised cases rose from a similar level to a peak of 2,388 in a little over two weeks.

The head of the hospital in Sion in Valais told RTS today that he is concerned by the steep rise in Covid-19 patients. He said the rise now is much steeper than it was in March. If it continues at this rate the hospital could struggle to cope in 10 or 15 days.

Masks now mandatory across the whole of Switzerland

Masks have been compulsory for everyone over 12 on public transport since 6 July 2020. From 19 October 2020, this rule will be extended to railway stations, including platforms, airports and other publicly accessible public transport areas.

In addition, masks will be compulsory in publicly accessible indoor spaces including all shops, shopping centres, banks, post offices, museums, libraries, cinemas, theatres, concert venues, indoor areas of zoos and botanical gardens, restaurants, bars, discos, casinos, hotels (with the exception of guests' rooms), entrance areas and changing rooms in swimming pools, sports facilities and gyms, doctor's surgeries, hospitals and places of worship, advise and neighbourhood centres and publicly accessible areas of administrative buildings.

Face masks must also be worn in schools, higher education establishments, child-care facilities and training areas of sport and fitness centres if the organisation includes this requirement in its Covid-19 protection plan, something that could vary from school to school.

Gatherings of more than 15 not permitted in public

Spontaneous gatherings of more than 15 persons are not permitted in public spaces such as town squares, streets, paths and parks. Organised outdoor events, such as political and civil society demonstrations, are permitted provided precautionary measures are observed. The aim of this measure is to prevent private events moving outdoors.

In restaurants, bars and clubs, food and drink may only be consumed while seated, both indoors and out.

Family gatherings and private events

Private gatherings should be avoided. At private events that cannot be avoided, food and drink may only be consumed while seated if there are more than 15 people present. Anyone standing up must wear a mask. In addition, hygiene rules must be observed at all times and contact details must be recorded. For private events of more than 100 people there must be a set of precautionary measures. Such events may only be held in publicly accessible venues.

Working from home now recommended

From Monday, employers are required to follow the recommendation by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) for employees to work from home.

Despite the restrictions, the Federal Council said that it hopes the economy can continue to function and people can live their lives with as little disruption as possible.

22.7 Covid-19 blood plasma therapy has limited effect, study finds

Source: theguardian.com,23 October,2020

Early analysis from a different trial suggested a reduction in deaths among those who received plasma with high levels of antibodies early in the course of their disease

It has been touted as a breakthrough treatment by Donald Trump, and there are hopes that blood plasma containing coronavirus antibodies may help British patients during the second wave of Covid-19 as well.

But a study, which is published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) on Friday, suggests "convalescent plasma" has only limited effectiveness and fails to reduce deaths or stop the progression to severe disease.

Plasma is the clear, yellowish liquid part of the blood which carries red and white blood cells and platelets around the body. After an infection, plasma is often packed with antibodies generated by the immune system. As such, it is sometimes harvested from

people who have recovered from a disease and transfused into patients who are fighting it. This convalescent plasma therapy was used during the 1918 flu pandemic, as well as during more recent global health emergencies, treating patients with Sars or Ebola.

Various trials around the world are exploring whether convalescent plasma could help reduce deaths and serious complications from Covid-19, with the largest randomised controlled trial taking place in the UK.

Despite the findings of the latest published study, convalescent plasma may yet prove to be effective against Covid-19.

The research involved 464 adults with moderate Covid-19 who were admitted to hospitals in India between April and July. Approximately half received two transfusions of convalescent plasma, 24 hours apart, alongside standard care, while the control group received standard care only.

One month later, 19% of those who received the plasma had progressed to severe disease or had died of any cause, compared with 18% in the control group. Plasma therapy did, however, seem to reduce symptoms, such as shortness of breath and fatigue, after seven days.

A spokesperson for NHS Blood and Transplant, which is collecting plasma from people who have recovered from Covid-19, emphasised that UK-based studies are only infusing plasma that contains high levels of coronavirus antibodies. He said the Indian study used plasma with antibody levels around six to 10 times lower than that.

The Indian researchers agreed that further studies using high antibody levels may find it to be more effective. An interim analysis of 136 Covid-19 patients in a trial at Houston Methodist hospital in Texas suggested a significant reduction in deaths among patients who received plasma with high levels of antibodies early in the course of their disease.

Followup data from all 351 patients in the Texas study has been published as a preprint and supports this conclusion, although plasma transfusion later in the course of the disease had no significant effect on death rates regardless of antibody levels. "With respect to altering mortality, our analysis identified an optimal window of 44 hours post-hospitalisation for transfusing Covid-19 patients with high titre convalescent plasma," they wrote.

Prof Paul Morgan, the director of the Systems Immunity Research Institute at Cardiff University and a member of the British Society for Immunology's expert taskforce on immunology and Covid-19, said there were other reasons for optimism. For one thing, he said, the study suggested plasma therapy was associated with a reduction in viral load, "so,

there does seem to be an antiviral effect of the therapy, even if it isn't reflected in the final outcomes".

The study also hinted that infusing patients with large amounts of donated plasma could lead to a small but significant increase in deaths. "It might be worth considering, rather than giving just convalescent plasma, taking the antibodies out of the plasma and using those," Morgan said. Such purified antibodies are already used to treat patients with antibody deficiencies.

22.8 Sri Lanka increases coronavirus-curfew zones after spike in cases

Source: newindianexpress.com,25 October,2020

The virus death toll rose to 15 on Saturday after a 56-year-old heart patient died in the North Western Province due to coronavirus complication.

COLOMBO: Authorities in Sri Lanka increased the coronavirus-related curfew zones to 56 police divisions on Sunday, to check the virus spread through community-level transmission. So far, the island nation has reported 7,521 COVID-19 cases.

The virus death toll rose to 15 on Saturday after a 56-year-old heart patient died in the North Western Province due to coronavirus complication.

"There are 56 police divisions which have been placed under police curfew and violators would be strictly dealt with," Police Spokesman Ajith Rohana said on Sunday.

Rohana added that people's movement in these areas will be monitored.

The new curfew zones are mostly from capital district Colombo and eastern district Batticaloa.

The Colombo municipality area has seen sharp rise in infections, Chief City Medical Officer Dr Ruwan Wijemuni said.

Colombo city has reported 548 cases in the last four days.

Sri Lanka reported 743 cases on Saturday, along with its 15th COVID-19 death.

The country has reported 4,050 cases since October 4 from just two clusters -- a garment export factory in Minuwangoda, Western Province and a wholesale fish market in Peliyagoda, a suburban area of Colombo.

Dr Wijemuni said the fish market cluster was more dangerous with too many secondary and tertiary contacts.

Sri Lankan health workers take a swab sample from a man to test for COVID-19 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Thursday, Oct. 22

Of the total 7,521 COVID-19 cases reported till now, 3,714 have been discharged from hospitals after complete recovery.

Health authorities said investigation is currently underway to establish whether the export factory or the fish market is the originating point of the second wave since October 4.

Authorities have ruled out a blanket lockdown due to the strain on the economy.

Meanwhile, Health minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi has said that the World Health Organisation has asked the government to be prepared for the distribution of vaccine depending on successful clinical trials.

22.9 10% of England's population could be tested for Covid-19 every week

Source: theguardian.com,28 October,2020

Exclusive: NHS test and trace asks public health directors to sign up to rapid saliva testing plan

The use of 30-minute saliva kits would be an acceleration of Boris Johnson's controversial 'Operation Moonshot' mass screening plan

Up to 10% of England's population could be tested for coronavirus every week after government officials asked local health chiefs to deploy 30-minute saliva kits in an acceleration of Boris Johnson's controversial "Operation Moonshot" mass screening plan.
In a letter seen by the Guardian, NHS test and trace claims it is embarking on an "important new front in our fight against coronavirus" and asks all directors of public health to sign up to receive rapid-result test kits for up to a tenth of their populations every week, to contain outbreaks and preserve freedoms.

If delivered, it could result in a huge increase in national testing – up to 5m tests weekly from the current rate of about 300,000 so-called PCR tests a day, carried out by swabbing the nose and throat.

But local health leaders raised serious concerns over the logistical challenge and cost of rolling out the tests and tracing the contacts of those who test positive.

It came as UK coronavirus deaths surpassed 300 for the second day in a row, with 24,701 more cases and more than 9,500 people in hospital.

Last week Matt Hancock, the health secretary, told parliament the government had bought "many millions" of saliva tests made by the company Innova. Johnson said on 16 October that the tests would become available "to help control localised outbreaks" but the latest strategy also extends beyond saliva test trials announced for schools, universities and care homes.

UK: number of coronavirus deaths per day
Starting from day of first reported death

Data from Johns Hopkins University at 11:02 UTC 30 Dec 2020
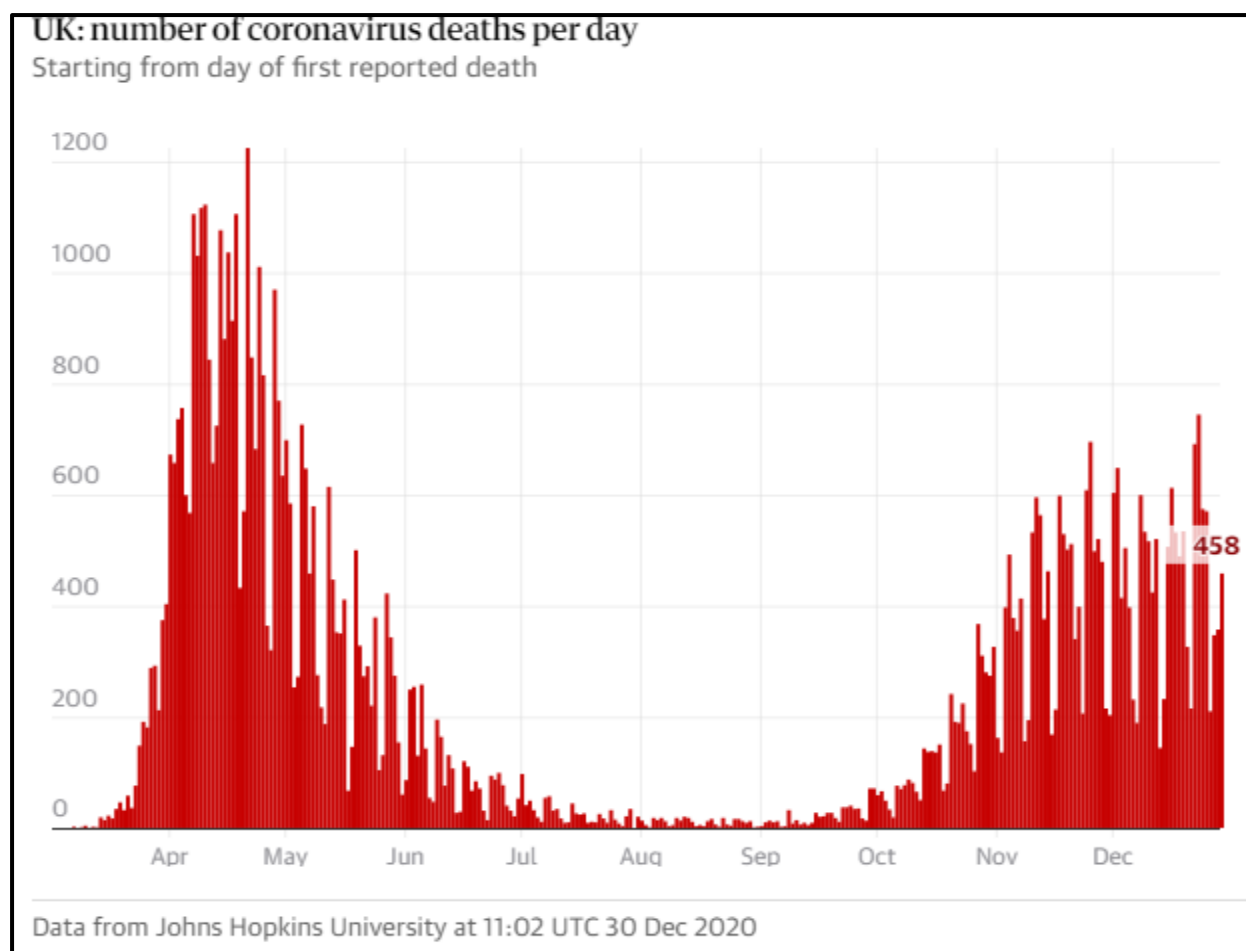
In the leaked letter, Alex Cooper, director of rapid testing at NHS test and trace, said: "Each director of public health will be eligible to receive on a weekly basis the number of tests equivalent to 10% of their population."

The rollout will be "phased" with areas under tier 3 restrictions – such as Liverpool and Manchester – prioritised, with the potential to test the whole local population every 10 weeks.

But, Cooper said, the ambition is "to make this technology available for local areas to roll out at pace", adding that the programme would go nationwide "as quickly as possible".

Some local public health directors have dismissed the idea already. One said he would refuse to take part because the tests were "short on scientific backing" and his stretched

staff lacked the capacity to deliver at such scale. Another said the lack of any proposed support to track people's close contacts if they tested positive rendered it pointless.

The saliva tests, known as lateral flow tests, deliver results far faster than PCR tests, which are taking longer than 48 hours to process in many cases. They are aimed at testing asymptomatic people to "protect those at higher risk, find the virus, break transmission and enable wider social and economic activity", NHS test and trace told public health directors.

Aside from key workers, PCR tests are only available to people with symptoms of Covid-19.

The saliva antigen tests do not require a laboratory-based RNA extraction. They have been clinically validated, according to NHS test and trace, but still require operational validation. The government has purchased up to 20m of the £15 tests according to reports.

The first details of Operation Moonshot emerged in September when leaked documents showed how it was using private consultants including Deloitte to potentially spend up to £100bn on mass screening.

On Wednesday, academics at Glasgow, St Andrews and Newcastle universities warned its stated target of reaching 10m daily tests "will generate 10,000 people testing falsely positive a day and result in unnecessary isolation and hardship for them and their contacts".

Local authorities were asked to express interest in the programme by Monday this week. Eugene Milne, Newcastle's director of public health, said he wanted to explore using the tests for screening relatives of care home residents across north-east England so visits could restart and care workers could work between nursing homes and houses.

However, others are less keen. "I'm going nowhere near it," said Greg Fell, the director of public health in Sheffield. "It is an interesting idea, but is short on scientific backing and has huge logistical challenges. I don't have the capacity for that. We ought to focus on delivering on stuff there is scientific basis for as opposed to taking out attention to things which aren't yet established."

Another senior director of public health, who asked not to be named, said: "They have come to us with a proposal that is poorly thought through. It is not clear what the cost is or the amount of work involved and there is nothing about contact tracing."

UK testing has increased significantly since April

All tests | Positive tests

28 December
More tests in the community
357,880 tests
41,385 positive

5 April
More tests in hospital
13,238 tests
6,199 positive

Mar   Apr   May   Jun   Jul   Aug   Sep   Oct   Nov   Dec

Note: Number of all coronavirus test results and number that are positive, published every day. 5th April had the highest percentage of positive test results (47%). Data: data.gov.uk. updated 28 December, 2020

NHS test and trace, headed by Dido Harding, wants local authorities to "be responsible for site selection and deployment of [lateral flow] testing in line with their priorities".

Local health chiefs will also have to recruit and train their own workforces to carry out the tests and will have liability for clinical protocols. Councils will have to provide digital notification of positive tests and organise standard PCR swab tests to confirm results.

The anonymous director of public health continued: "There is no point in testing large numbers of the population unless you do something with the results. We really, really want to improve testing and tracing, but once again this is the wrong way to go about it."

NHS test and trace's performance has worsened in recent weeks. After last week's figures, the prime minister expressed frustration at the system's shortcomings and Sir Patrick

Vallance, the UK government's chief scientific adviser, admitted rising caseloads were "diminishing its effectiveness".

A senior public health source who has been on calls about the project with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said the attempted national rollout appeared rushed.

"We don't know who does the contact tracing or how the workforce [to carry out the tests] is resourced," they said. "We are trying to work out how this fits with the test-and-trace strategy with PCR testing and how any positive results are followed up and people are isolated."

The Department of Health and Social Care said it had been encouraged by strong interest from directors of public health. A spokesperson said: "As the prime minister has announced we are already piloting new testing technologies in [the] north-west, north-east and Yorkshire with repeat testing for priority groups to identify those most at risk of spreading the virus.

"We continue to work tirelessly to make sure everyone who needs a test can get one and this includes introducing new, highly reliable technology to allow us to test more people and deliver rapid results at scale."

22.10 US reports world record of over one lakh Covid-19 cases in single day

Source: thehindubusinessline.com,31 October,2020

As per the numbers of the last two days, the US is now reporting more than one new case every second

The United States (US) set a new all-time high for coronavirus cases confirmed in a single 24-hour period on Friday, reporting just over one lakh new infections to surpass the record total of 91,000 posted a day earlier, according to a Reuters tally.

The daily caseload of 100,233 is also a world record for the global pandemic, surpassing the 97,894 cases reported by India on a single day in September.

Five times over the past 10 days, the US has exceeded its previous single-day record of 77,299 cases registered in July. The number of daily infections reported during past two days indicates that the nation is now reporting more than one new case every second.

The spike comes just four days ahead of the US presidential election on Tuesday. The Covid-19 pandemic, which has killed nearly 2.3 lakh people in the US, has dominated the final stretch of the campaign.

Also read: As Covid roars back in US, Trump stages rallies in Arizona

The United States crossed 90 lakh cumulative cases on Friday, representing nearly three per cent of the population, according to a Reuters tally of publicly reported data.

On Friday, 16 US states reported their highest one-day coronavirus infections while 13 states were at record levels of hospitalised Covid-19 patients.

So far in October, 31 states have set records for increases in new cases, including five considered key in the November 3 presidential election: Ohio, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. President Donald Trump and Democratic rival Joe Biden held rallies in Florida on Thursday, showcasing their contrasting approaches to the pandemic.

The nationwide surge in cases seen in the past week is pushing the United States towards the grim mark of one lakh daily cases. India holds the record of most number of daily coronavirus cases 97,894 cases, it reported on September 17.

For every 10,000 people in the United States, over 272 coronavirus cases have been reported and about seven people have died, according to a Reuters analysis. In Europe there have been 127 cases and four deaths per 10,000 residents.

More than 1,000 people died of the virus on Thursday, marking the third time in October that milestone has been passed in a single day. The number of patients hospitalised with Covid-19 has risen more than 50 per cent in October to 46,000, the highest figure since mid-August.

NOVEMBER 2020

23.1 Highlights: New lockdown in England may extend beyond a month, says UK govt

Source: hindustantimes.com,1 November,2020

As per Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan, India's case fatality rate is below 1.5% with over 23 states and UTs' CFR being even below this national average.

A medical worker takes sample from a man to test for coronavirus infection) during the lockdown, at in Kolkata, West Bengal, Monday, April 20, 2020

Coronavirus tally in India has crossed 8.1 million. In the last 24 hours, the country has recorded 46,963 fresh cases of Covid-19. As per the Union health ministry's dashboard, there are 5,70,458 active cases in India, 74,91,513 patients have recovered and 1,22,111 deaths have been recorded in total.

Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan in a tweet yesterday said that India has seen significant success in the collective fight against coronavirus and that the country's case fatality rate is below 1.5% with over 23 states and UTs' CFR being even below this national average.

Meanwhile, England will be entering a month long lockdown from Thursday to contain the virus, as announced by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Saturday.

23.2 UK coronavirus death toll rises by almost 500 in 24 hours

Source: independent.co.uk,4 November,2020

Total of 25,177 new infections reported across the UK, government figures show

The UK has registered 492 new coronavirus deaths over the latest 24-hour period, according to new government data.

This is the highest figure since 19 May, when 500 deaths were reported nationwide.

The number of people in the UK to die within 28 days of a positive Covid test now stands at 47,742.

Separately, 60,051 deaths with Covid-19 on the death certificate have been recorded since the onset of the pandemic.

According to the NHS, one of the victims was aged 13 years old. Of the 302 deaths recorded in England, all except 12 had known underlying health conditions.

A further 25,177 new infections were reported across the UK, data from the Department of Health and Social Care shows, bringing the nationwide total to 1,099,059.

The new figures come as MPs voted to back the new four-week coronavirus lockdown in England, after Boris Johnson warned of an "existential threat" to the NHS if action was not taken.

Ahead of the Commons vote on Wednesday, the prime minister said the government was not seeking to impose the new controls "lightly". But he told MPs at Prime Minister's Questions that it was essential that they took action now to curb the spread of the disease.

With Labour supporting the new restrictions, the government comfortably passed the vote with a majority of 478 – though 38 Tory MPs defied the party whip to vote against the new restrictions.

Prior to the vote, the PM had urged all MPs to put aside "party political wrangling and point-scoring" and to come together to drive down the infection rate.

Health secretary Matt Hancock said that in ordinary times the measures outlined would be "unimaginable".

He told the Commons: "Ultimately this comes to a very significant judgement. It comes to a judgement about how we best manage a nation and lead a nation through an incredibly difficult period, with a pandemic of a virus which exists only to multiply.

"So in ordinary times, these measures would be unimaginable, but these are not ordinary times. It's a virus in circulation that feeds off the human contact that makes life worth living and we must act to thwart its deadly march to protect our NHS and to save countless lives."

The new restrictions will be implemented from midnight, as the NHS in England moves into its highest alert – level 4 – amid a continuing rise in coronavirus patients needing hospital care.

Earlier in the day, the head of NHS England said the service was ready to "fire the starting gun" whenever a vaccine became available.

Chief executive Sir Simon Stevens said GPs will be put on standby from December should a vaccine become available before Christmas.

However, he said the "expectation" was that any vaccination programme would begin in the new year – pending positive results from the clinical trials.

Meanwhile, the chief of the UK vaccine taskforce has said she is more than 50 per cent confident that all vulnerable people will have been vaccinated against coronavirus by Easter or early summer, with GPs across the country now prepping to administer a Covid-19 jab over the Christmas period.

Kate Bingham told MPs that there was a "very high" chance that a vaccine would be effective in reducing illness and mortality, but said it was unlikely that it would be able to entirely eradicate the virus.

She said that data from the Oxford and Pfizer/BioNTech candidates would be available by the end of the year, with millions of doses from the two leading vaccines set to be rolled out across the UK as soon as regulatory approval is granted.

"If I put on my rose-tinted specs, I would hope that we will see positive interim data from both Oxford and from Pfizer/BioNTech in early December and if we get that then I think we have got the possibility of deploying by the year-end," she said during Wednesday's Science and Technology Committee meeting.

23.3 COVID-19: Quebec reports 1,234 new cases and 29 more deaths

Source: globalnews.ca,7 November,2020

People wear face masks as they walk along a street in Montreal, Saturday, November 7, 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Canada and around the world

Quebec reported 1,234 new cases of COVID-19 on Saturday and 29 additional deaths.

This is the fourth straight day the province reported over 1,000 daily infections.

The death tally in the province now stands at 6,431 and the total number of people who have contracted COVID-19 in Quebec is now 113,423.

According to health officials, of the 29 new reported deaths — 11 occurred in the last 24 hours, 13 between Oct. 31 and Nov. 5, and five prior to Oct. 31.

The number of hospitalizations has gone down by 16 from Friday for a total of 523 — 78 of which are in intensive care.

According to public health, 30,919 tests were conducted on Nov. 5 — the last day for which testing data is available. Over 3,276,780 novel coronavirus tests have been conducted since the beginning of the pandemic. On Saturday Premier François Legault urged Quebecers to maintain efforts to flatten the COVID-19 curve this winter. In an open letter, Legault thanked citizens for showing solidarity and expressed hope that grandparents will be able to see their grandchildren at Christmas.

Quebec officials have said they are especially concerned about Saguenay, north of Quebec City, and Lanaudière, north of Montreal — regions Legault has dubbed "the worst" in the province on a per-capita basis. The Canadian COVID-19 infection tally currently stands at more than 258,000, with nearly half in Quebec and about a third in Ontario.

23.4 Pfizer, Sinopharm vaccines show promise, virologists call for end to politicization of COVID-19 vaccine

Source: globaltimes.cn,10 November,2020

A staff member takes out samples of the COVID-19 inactivated vaccine at a vaccine production plant of China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm) in Beijing, capital of China, April 11, 2020

US drug maker Pfizer said its mRNA vaccine candidate is more than 90 percent effective, while Sinopharm's inactivated vaccine showed 100 percent efficacy at one case in Mexico, both are promising results and have brought about hope of wider use in the fight against the coronavirus, experts said. Pfizer released limited data, saying an analysis of 94 confirmed cases indicated an efficacy rate above 90 percent, Pfizer said on Monday. Pfizer plans to apply for emergency use at the Food and Drug Administration Pfizer in late November and claimed it can manufacture doses for 15 to 20 million people by the year end, the New York Times reported. Pfizer and German drug maker BioNTech co-developed the vaccine. Its phase III clinical trial enrolled nearly 44,000 participants. Pfizer's announcement got world's attention and many news outlets reported it with enthusiasm, but Sinopharm's vaccine, which have been used on 56,000 people who have traveled abroad, none of whom became infected, were challenged by many Western media when the data was released. The different reaction revealed Western media's double standard on vaccines for China and the US, with an aim to politicize the issue, Chinese experts said.

A vaccine is the key to fighting the spread of the coronavirus. The development of a vaccine is a race against time, and should follow science, a Beijing-based immunologist told the Global Times on Tuesday on condition of anonymity. He said politicizing the vaccine would only hurt its development. Vaccine experts noted that Pfizer's efficacy data, if accurate, is a promising rate. It can actually help prove the credibility of reported efficiency of China's Sinopharm vaccine, which was authorized for emergency use and has protected more than 56,000 people who have traveled abroad. Sinopharm on Friday released details of a case of Huawei's Mexico branch, where 81 out of 99 staff were inoculated with the vaccine. Ten unvaccinated employees contracted the virus in an outbreak in this office. The Mexico case alone showed a 100 percent efficacy, which has contributed to the evaluation of Sinopharm's inactivated vaccine candidate, Tao Lina, a Shanghai-based vaccine expert, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

Pfizer's 90 percent was based on phase III clinical trials while Sinopharm's is based on observation after emergency use. Although the former has greater authority academically, the latter is also a control study, Tao further explained, noting that the fact 56,000 people did not get infected could serve as a reference for the vaccine's efficacy. Ten out of 99 getting infected is a severe outbreak, showing that Sinopharm's vaccine is very promising, he said.

China has approved three vaccines for urgent use. These have been given to high-risk groups, such as medical staff, diplomats sent to most-affected countries, and employees sent overseas under the Belt and Road Initiative.

China is also developing an mRNA vaccine, the method used by Pfizer. Industry experts noted that theoretically, mRNA vaccines can stimulate both cellular immunity and antibody immunity, and therefore have better effects than just antibodies. Tao said that China's inactivated vaccines are suitable for extensive use to protect more people from the coronavirus while mRNA vaccines, once approved for commercial production, are easier for expanding production. But a major challenge for mRNA vaccines is the temperature requirement for storage - minus 70C for long-term stability in comparison to 2-8 C for the majority of other types of vaccine, Tao noted, "Storage and transportation will be very expensive."

According to media reports, Pfizer's mRNA vaccine can be kept stable for five days in temperatures of 2-8 C, and its Chinese partner Fosun Pharm is building minus 70C cold storage facilities near airports and arranging cold chain to distribute the vaccine to centers in China.

Pfizer is cooperating with Fosun Pharm and the latter is in charge of bridging overseas clinical trial data with domestic data to get the vaccine approved in China.

While all vaccines are racing against the clock to protect human lives from the virus, different technology routes will be tested in the fight against coronavirus, and mRNA, a newer method used for developing vaccines, might be the future direction for the industry, Tao said. According to the Johns Hopkins University, global COVID-19 infections have reached 50, 913, 451 with 1,263,089 deaths as of 8 pm Tuesday.

23.5 COVID-19: Global Infection Toll Crosses 54 Million As China Witnesses Resurgence

Source: republicworld.com,15 November,2020

The total number of COVID-19 cases has surpassed 54 million on November 15, the latest data by US based John Hopkins University showed.

The total number of COVID-19 cases globally has surpassed 54 million on November 15, the latest data by John Hopkins University showed. As per the Baltimore bases university and research centre, the number of fatalities reached 1,313,438 while 34.7 million people have recovered till now.

Holding its rank, the US with over 10,908, 852 positive cases and 245,617 fatalities remained the worst affected country.

India also continued to follow it by reporting 88,14,579 total cases. The death toll was mounted to 1,29,635 while total active cases rose to 4,79,216 after a decrease of 1,503 in the last 24 hrs. Brazil, which is currently testing Chinese COVID-19 vaccine, recorded 5,848,959 cases and 165,658 deaths. The other nations which are witnessing surge include Russia, which has reported 1,910,149 and France with 1,915,713 cases.

China witnesses resurgence of COVID-19

This comes as China recently detected Coronavirus samples on the packing of a batch of imported beef & shrimp. According to an international news agency, the first instance of detecting COVID-19 on the packaging of a batch of Brazilian beef was recorded in Wuhan. As per the statement issued by Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, 3 positive Coronavirus samples have been collected from the outer packing of frozen beef from Brazil.'

The statement further stated that this packaged food had entered China via Qingdao on August 7 and was later transported to Wuhan on August 17. Since then, the package had remained in the cold facility, until recently. Reacting to this news, Brazil government while speaking to an international news agency stated that the Chinese authorities have not yet informed them about this incident.

23.6 Hull left forgotten as Covid cases soar in city, council boss says

Source: theguardian.com,16 November,2020

A man walks through Hull city centre. The Covid case rate is almost triple England's average at 770 cases per 100,000 people.

Hull has been "forgotten" by central government as the city's coronavirus cases have increased at an "astonishing and terrifying rate" to become the highest in England, its council leader has said.

Stephen Brady of Hull city council said it needed urgent national support but had received no contact from the government.

The number of coronavirus patients in Hull's hospitals has passed the peak of the first wave and its infection rate has risen tenfold in barely five weeks.

At 770 cases per 100,000 people it is nearly triple England's average and far higher than other Covid-19 hotspots. A council spokeswoman said public health officials were warning that the peak in Hull – which has recorded 252 coronavirus deaths – is yet to come.
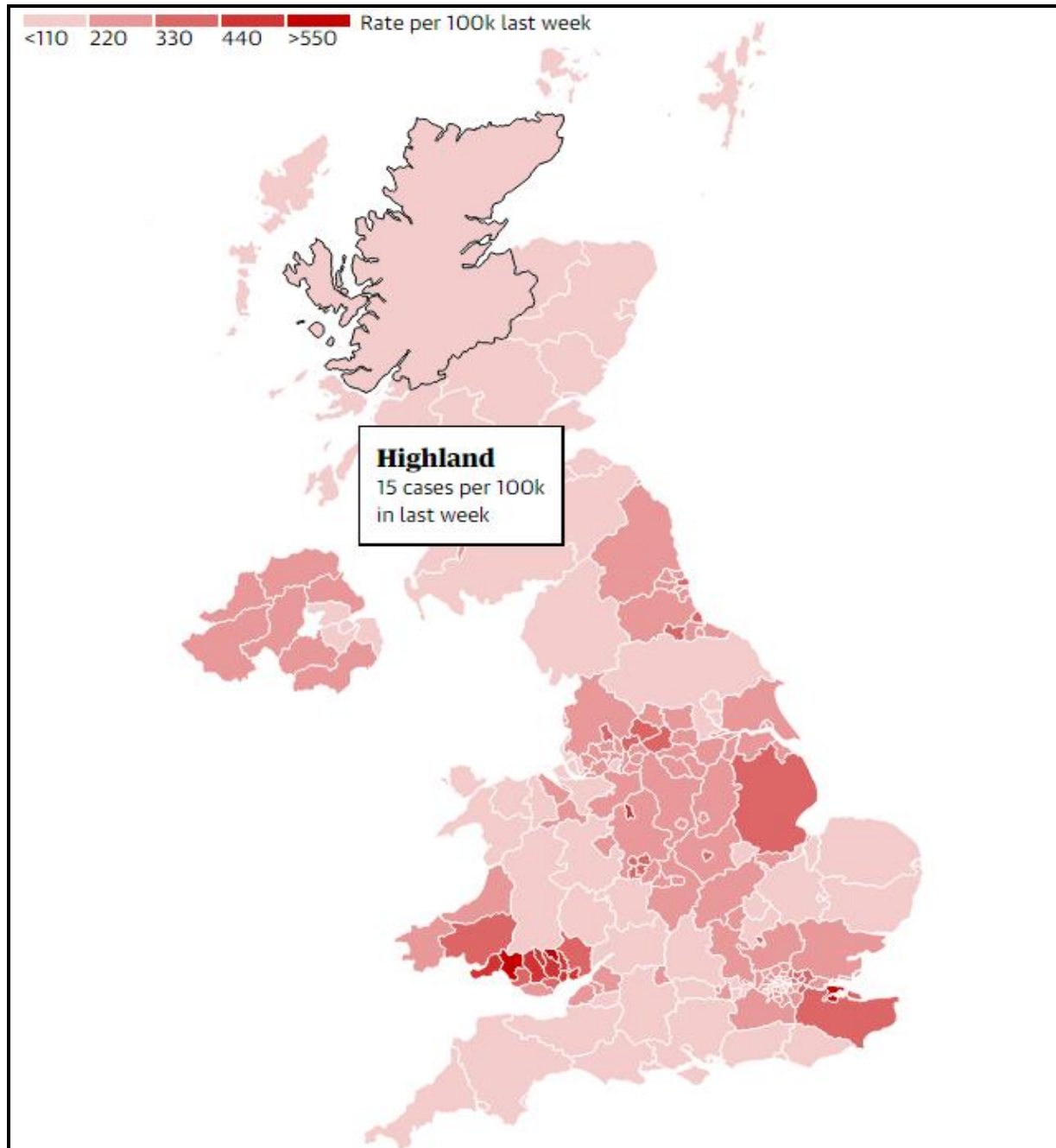
Data: data.gov.uk. Cases per 100k in the seven days to 1 Dec 2020. Cases assigned to date of test. If any area in a local authority is in higher restrictions than the rest of the county, restrictions map shows the whole county in these restrictions

In a letter to Boris Johnson on Monday, Brady said: "I am writing to express my grave concerns about the consequences of the current Covid-19 health emergency in Hull and the absence of central government support to assist us in overcoming it.

"As I am sure you are aware, our infection rate is now one of the highest in the country and … the infection rates in our city have increased at a, frankly, astonishing and terrifying rate over the last few weeks."

He continued: "Hull and our people have dealt with some huge challenges in the past, and we have always overcome them, but, on this occasion, as has too frequently been the case in the past, we seem, once again, to be the forgotten city."

Brady asked Johnson for more freedom to enforce local restrictions, more support from Public Health England, discussions about what will happen in Hull when the planned period of national restrictions ends, discussions about financial support for local businesses, and additional support and resources for the area's hospitals.

On Monday the council said there were 188 confirmed Covid-positive patients in hospital in Hull, with a further 38 suspected cases.

Mike Whale, the Hull district secretary for the National Education Union, said three in every 10 children were out of school self-isolating in the city – which would amount to about 12,000 children.

He said there was huge support among Hull's teachers to close the city's schools until the virus was under control. "While children may not be overly vulnerable, the number of adult staff in schools who are currently isolating is really significant and schools are really struggling to stay open," he said.

The cause of the exponential rise in cases – up from 75.4 per 100,000 on 1 October – remains unclear but Dr Cheryl Walter, a virologist at the University of Hull, has said she believes it may in part be due to the city having low immunity levels.

Hull managed to avoid the worst of the first wave and continued to have low case numbers throughout the summer, compared with other parts of northern England where the infection rate remained relatively high when the first national lockdown was lifted.

Walter said the virus may have crept over to Hull from nearby areas on the "M62 corridor". She told the Hull Daily Mail that a potential reason for the rise was "we had little 'community immunity' going into the second wave, as London did and … winter is almost always a time of year when airborne infectious diseases are most prevalent".

Boris Johnson addressed Tory MPs in northern England who have formed a pressure group that has taken Downing Street to task over the impact of Covid-19 lockdown measures. He labelled the MPs his "praetorian guard".

More than 50 Tory MPs signed a letter to Johnson last month – before the imposition of the current 28-day restrictions – urging him to provide a "clear roadmap" out of lockdown,

arguing that pandemic "has exposed in sharp relief the deep structural and systemic disadvantage faced by our communities".

One Conservative MP on the hour-long Zoom call said: "He was on fantastic form, he took the entire meeting standing up. He was very animated, bouncy. He was clearly not a man in poor health. He said he wants us to open up as much as we can on the 2 December but that we had to recognise that this was a dangerous, nasty illness that we needed to get under control."

23.7 WHO recommends against the use of remdesivir in COVID-19 patients

Source: who.int,20 november,2020

WHO has issued a conditional recommendation against the use of remdesivir in hospitalized patients, regardless of disease severity, as there is currently no evidence that remdesivir improves survival and other outcomes in these patients.

This recommendation, released on 20 November, is part of a living guideline on clinical care for COVID-19. It was developed by an international guideline development group, which includes 28 clinical care experts, 4 patient-partners and one ethicist.

The guidelines were developed in collaboration with the non-profit Magic Evidence Ecosystem Foundation (MAGIC), which provided methodologic support. The guidelines are an innovation, matching scientific standards with the speed required to respond to an ongoing pandemic.

Work on this began on 15 October when the WHO Solidarity Trial published its interim results. Data reviewed by the panel included results from this trial, as well as 3 other randomized controlled trials. In all, data from over 7000 patients across the 4 trials were considered.

The evidence suggested no important effect on mortality, need for mechanical ventilation, time to clinical improvement, and other patient-important outcomes The guideline development group recognized that more research is needed, especially to provide higher certainty of evidence for specific groups of patients. They supported continued enrollment in trials evaluating remdesivir.

Updated 20 November 2020

* A conditional recommendation is issued when the evidence around the benefits and risks of an intervention are less certain. In this case, there is a conditional recommendation against the use of remdesivir. This means that there isn't enough evidence to support its use.

23.8 Russia says data on Sputnik Covid vaccine shows 95% efficacy

Source: theguardian.com,24 November,2020

Country offers to share technology, saying results positive for the entire world

Kirill Dmitriev, who has been tasked with selling the vaccine abroad, said on Tuesday that a dose would cost about $10 on international markets about half the cost of the Pfizer vaccine

Russia has said that its coronavirus vaccine has more than 95% efficacy according to new preliminary data, giving it a success rate comparable to vaccines being developed by Pfizer and Moderna.

Russian officials also claimed their vaccine had greater efficacy than the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine because of Russia's proprietary technology, which it offered to share with British scientists.

"Sputnik shows very high effectiveness, higher than 95%," Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, said during a briefing on Tuesday. "This is indisputably positive news not just for Russia, but for the entire world, for all countries."

The preliminary results were released as competition heats up among vaccine developers to mass produce a coronavirus jab and help bring the pandemic to an end.

Not everyone is convinced by Russia's official data, however, and suspicions have been increased by the fact Russian authorities speedily licensed the vaccine before the results of stage three trials were available, as well as reports of state employees being coerced into taking part in trials.

While numerous countries have expressed an interest in studying or purchasing the vaccine, few western countries have signed up. Among EU nations, only Hungary has expressed a serious interest, causing friction with other members of the bloc. A spokesman for the European commission said the body "does not have any data regarding this Russian vaccine," Interfax reported on Tuesday evening.

The Sputnik results were computed after 42 days of a study in which 19,000 participants received two doses of the vaccine and 21,000 participants received a single dose. Earlier data showed that the vaccine had an approximately 91.4% efficacy 28 days after participants received the first dose.

Top officials, including Dmitriev, claim to have taken the vaccine and have said they feel fine. The Kremlin said on Monday that Vladimir Putin had not had a coronavirus jab, with a spokesman saying that the president could not take part in a medical trial.

"After all, the president can't use an uncertified vaccine," said Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman.

A successful vaccine is Russia's key to emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, which has infected more than 2.15 million people in the country and is currently spreading at a record pace.

Vladimir Putin and many regional heads have been hesitant to introduce a broad lockdown similar to earlier this year out of concern for the harm to the country's economy.

The Russian prime minister Mikhail Mishustin said that the country's priority was for Russians to have access to the vaccine.

"Every person in every region in the country should have the possibility to be vaccinated against the disease," he said, adding that: "Nobody is going to be forced to do this."

But the vaccine's development at Russia's Gamaleya research institute has also been driven by the economic allure of selling it abroad and national pride in the country's scientific

Russia: number of new coronavirus cases per day
Starting from day of first reported case

26,588

Data from Johns Hopkins University at 15:32 UTC 30 Dec 2020
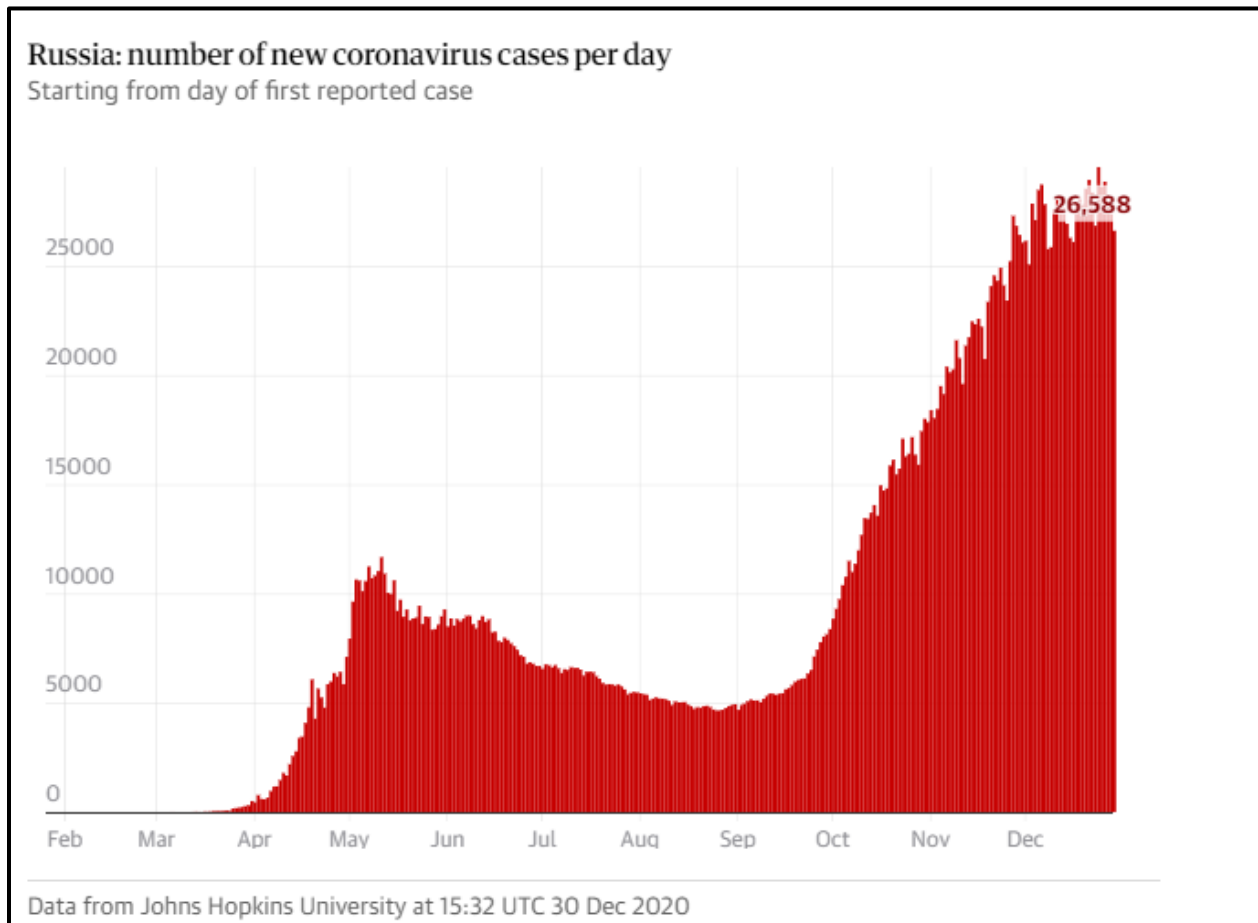
prowess that has earned comparisons to the cold war space race, when the Soviet Unions's Sputnik 1 was the world's first satellite to be launched into orbit around the Earth.

Dmitriev, who has been tasked with selling the vaccine abroad, said that a dose of the vaccine would cost no more than $10 (£7.50) on international markets – about half the cost of the Pfizer vaccine.

He predicted that more than 1bn doses would be produced in the next year in countries including India, Korea, Brazil, China, and Hungary, the first, and so far the only, EU country to express a serious interest in the Russian vaccine.

Ten sample batches arrived in Budapest on a temperature-controlled flight last week.

Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, who is currently in dispute with other European leaders over plans to link EU budget funds to rule of law criteria, has been criticised in the past for his friendly relations with the Kremlin.

The Hungarian government said it has made preliminary orders for a number of different vaccines, including those manufactured in Russia and China, and Orbán has promised that individual citizens would be able to choose which vaccine to take.

"As vaccination will not be compulsory, if there are several vaccines, everyone will be able to decide for themselves which one they trust most: whether they prefer the business-centred approach of a US corporation, the state-developed Russian vaccine, or the Chinese one," he said.

Hungary's foreign minister Péter Szijjártó said Hungarian scientists were now trialling the Russian vaccine in laboratories, "so that they'll be able to make a well-based decision on its possible usability and licensing".

However, under EU rules, the vaccine must be authorised by the European Medicines Agency before any member states can approve it for general use.

"The question arises whether a member state would want to administer to its citizens a vaccine that has not been reviewed by the EMA," a European commission spokesperson told Reuters last week, adding that using an untested vaccine could have the result of lowering confidence in vaccines in general among the population.

The Hungarian-American financier and philanthropist George Soros, who has been the target of a long-running smear campaign by the Orbán government, last week wrote in an article that Hungary's interest in the Russian vaccine "deserves to be investigated" given previous allegations of corruption against the Hungarian prime minister's inner circle.

Soros pointed out that Hungary appears to have paid up to 50 times more for ventilators than Germany, leading some to question the motives behind the deals.

In response, Orbán called Soros "the most corrupt man in the world" and said his advice on which vaccines to buy was not welcome.

"It isn't Soros's job to decide which vaccines are good and which aren't. That is for laboratories to decide and the Hungarian people, who will be free to choose from among several vaccines."

23.9 Moderna Covid vaccine has 94% efficacy, final results confirm

Source: theguardian.com,30 November,2020

US company submits data to start approval process with regulators around the world.Final results from the trials of Moderna's vaccine against Covid-19 confirm it has 94% efficacy and nobody who was vaccinated with it developed severe disease, said the company, kickstarting the approval process with regulators around the world.
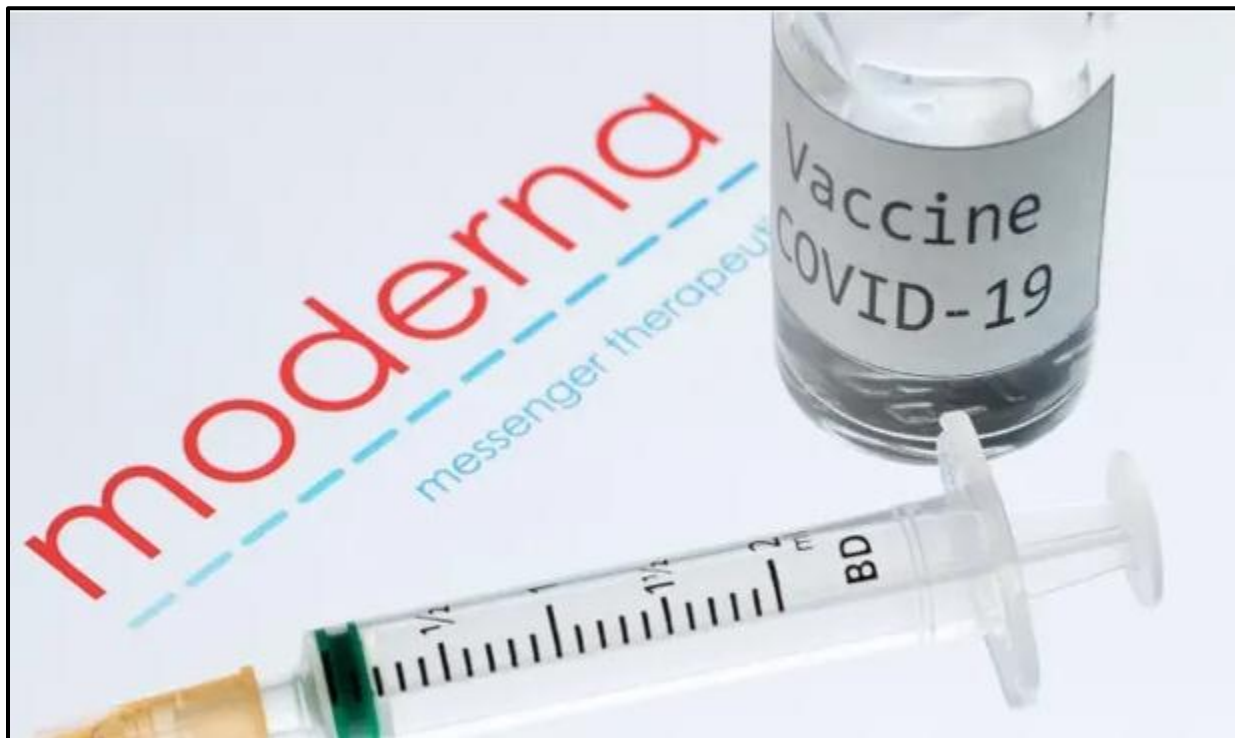
The UK has bought 7m doses of the Moderna vaccine

The US company is submitting the data to the regulators in the US, Europe and the UK for an emergency licence. It expects the Food and Drug Administration in the US to consider it at its meeting on 17 December, Moderna said.

The UK has bought 7m doses of the vaccine, 5m on the day Moderna announced its interim result of 94.5% efficacy, and a further 2m last week. But supplies of the vaccine to the UK are not expected until March. Moderna, based in Massachusetts, has received $2.48bn in US federal funds and was a key part of the Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed.

Although the firm has done deals around the world, the US will get access first. Moderna said it expected to have 20m doses of its vaccine ready for use in the US by the end of this

year. In August, the US bought 100m doses with an option on 400m more. Moderna says it is on track to manufacture 500m to 1bn doses globally in 2021.

Like Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna has used novel mRNA (messenger RNA) technology to develop its vaccine, involving the genetic code of the virus rather than any killed or weakened part of it. The two companies have announced remarkable and very similar results. Pfizer's final data analysis gave its vaccine 95% efficacy.

Moderna becomes the third company to pass its data to the regulators for approval, after Pfizer and then Oxford University/AstraZeneca. The UK vaccine has 70% efficacy overall, although among a subset of volunteers given a lower dose, the efficacy surprisingly rose to 90%. That finding will now be trialled in the US, amid concerns that it may be linked to the younger age of the volunteers, who were all under 55 in that arm of the trial.

However, 70% efficacy is enough to be very useful in a pandemic, particularly in countries without the ultra-cold freezers, at -70C to -80C, that are necessary for the Pfizer vaccine. Moderna's vaccine is said to be stable for a month at ordinary fridge temperatures once out of the freezer, but the cost will be prohibitive in many parts of the world. In August, the company said it was charging $32 (£24) to $37 a dose and defended its right to make commercial returns. The Oxford vaccine will cost less than £3 ($4) a dose. The UK has bought 100m doses of the Oxford vaccine, which will be a core part of its mass immunisation plans.

Moderna's phase 3 analysis involved 30,000 people in the US, half given the vaccine and half a placebo, and 196 of them became ill. Thirty people became severely ill and one died, but none of those had been given Moderna's vaccine. The trials included substantial numbers of people in the most at-risk groups, with 7,000 people over 65 and more than 5,000 younger people with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, severe obesity and cardiac disease.

The study included 11,000 people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, the company said, which is 37%, the same proportion as in the US population. There were 33 older adults and 42 people from BAME backgrounds in the final analysis. The company said there were no serious side-effects. The most common included sore arms, headaches and fatigue.
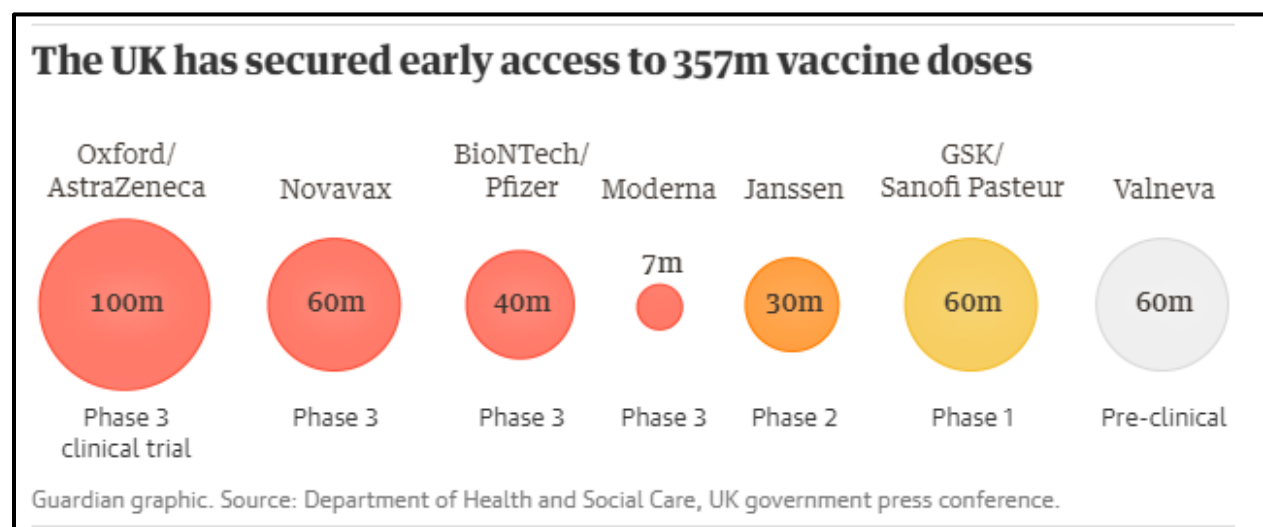
The full trial data has not been released, but would be published in a peer-reviewed journal in due course, Moderna said.

"This positive primary analysis confirms the ability of our vaccine to prevent Covid-19 disease with 94.1% efficacy and, importantly, the ability to prevent severe Covid-19 disease. We believe that our vaccine will provide a new and powerful tool that may change

the course of this pandemic and help prevent severe disease, hospitalisations and death," said Stéphane Bancel, chief executive officer of Moderna.

Stephen Evans, professor of pharmacoepidemiology, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said it was important not to pay too much attention to the exact percentage value of the efficacy.

"While the best estimate is 94.1% against all Covid-19 disease, the statistical uncertainty in this is such that the data are compatible with a true efficacy of about 87%," he said. "This is, of course, still a very good efficacy. Similarly, the 100% efficacy against more severe disease is compatible with an efficacy of 90%, again, this is very good and is some evidence that severe as well as mild disease is prevented."

The UK has secured early access to 357m vaccine doses

Oxford/ AstraZeneca	Novavax	BioNTech/ Pfizer	Moderna	Janssen	GSK/ Sanofi Pasteur	Valneva
100m	60m	40m	7m	30m	60m	60m
Phase 3 clinical trial	Phase 3	Phase 3	Phase 3	Phase 2	Phase 1	Pre-clinical

Guardian graphic. Source: Department of Health and Social Care, UK government press conference.

There was no evidence the vaccine performed worse in older adults, he said, which was encouraging.

Azra Ghani, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at Imperial College London, said it was good news that nobody given the vaccine developed severe disease. "Whilst this does not exclude some risk of severe disease after vaccination given the relatively small number of severe cases, these results suggest very high efficacy (>85%) against this endpoint," she said.

She looked forward to the full results, which would include some data on whether the vaccine prevents asymptomatic infections. "Efficacy against this would be very welcome as it would give the first indication of the broader indirect impact that widespread vaccination could have in reducing onward spread," she said.

24.1 International update: Global Covid infections pass 63.3 million – more than 1.47 million deaths

Source: pharmaceutical-technology.com,1 December,2020

Global: Global coronavirus infections have passed 63.3 million. Meanwhile, the global coronavirus death toll exceeds 1.47 million according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University.

The director general of the World Health Organization has warned that spending time with friends and family at Christmas is "not worth putting them or yourself at risk". Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the body's director general, said people should consider whether travelling during the festive period is necessary.

US: The US coronavirus death toll is 268,103 according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University, total infections number more than 13.5 million.

Scientists at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found evidence of Covid infection in blood donations collected by the American Red Cross from residents in nine US states between 13 December 2019, and 17 January, 2020, according to a study published online in the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases.

Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Stephen Hahn has been summoned to a meeting by White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows to explain why he hasn't moved faster to approve the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine, Axios reported, citing two senior administration officials. The meeting is set for Tuesday at 9:30 am in Washington, Axios said.

White House coronavirus adviser Scott Atlas, who won President Donald Trump's favor by advocating the loosening of social distancing restrictions during the pandemic, resigned his post on Monday, according to a White House official.

Texas's virus hospitalizations rose to 8,900, the third straight daily increase and the highest since 1 August, when the state's initial outbreak was still raging.

France: France has seen its death toll rise by 406 to 52,731. Its health ministry said there were 4,005 new cases, fewer than on Sunday. It has also seen a fall in people in intensive care, and in the numbers admitted to hospital due to the virus. The country's seven-day average of daily new infections stands at 11,118, an almost two-month low.

Brazil: Brazil's health ministry has confirmed 21,138 new cases of Covid-19 and 287 deaths. Earlier on Monday, the WHO urged its government to be "very, very serious" about its rising coronavirus infection numbers, as more than 170,000 have now been killed.

Mexico: Mexico is in a "bad shape" as coronavirus cases and deaths surge, according to the WHO. The country's death rally is now more than 105,500 and confirmed cases have passed 1.1 million. Public health experts believe it is likely to be significantly higher.

UK: The Labour party will abstain in a vote on England's new coronavirus tier system on Tuesday over a disagreement on support for the hospitality sector.

Italy: Italy's new virus cases on Monday were the lowest in five weeks. The country reported 16,377 daily cases, compared with 20,648 on Sunday. The country's total virus deaths surpassed 55,000 on Monday, with 672 daily fatalities, compared with 541 the day before.

Vaccine news

Serbia: Serbia is to start tests of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, as it continues talks with Pfizer about purchasing its jab. Laboratories will get 20 doses this week for testing, according to a statement from the country's prime minister, Ana Brnabić.

US: Vice President Mike Pence told governors on Monday that distribution of a coronavirus vaccine could begin by the third week of December, signalling that US regulators will swiftly approve an emergency authorization for the first shots.

Moderna Inc. requested clearance for its coronavirus vaccine in the US after a new analysis showed the vaccine was highly effective in preventing Covid-19, with no serious safety problems.

Lockdown updates

Colombia: Colombia will keep its land and river borders closed until 16 January in an attempt to stem Covid's spread.

Hong Kong: Hong Kong has set up a hotline for the public to report suspected violations of social distancing orders on private yachts, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said at a briefing. Enforcement authorities will also step up scrutiny of junk boat parties.

US: California is considering a return to stay-at-home orders as hospitalizations from the coronavirus soar, with projections showing that intensive-care demand will exceed capacity in the next month.

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy will toughen the limit on outdoor gatherings to 25 people from 150 and halt indoor high school sports for the rest of 2020 after reporting more than 28,000 new Covid-19 cases in the past week, according to a person familiar with the decision.

Turkey: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced a nationwide weekday curfew starting at 9 pm and ending at 5 am as the country copes with about 30,000 new cases per day. On the weekend, the curfew is stricter, running from 9 pm Friday to 5 am on Monday.

Philippines: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte extended the existing movement restrictions in the capital region through year-end, while keeping most of the country under the most lenient status. The capital Metro Manila and Davao City, which is the main economic center on the island of Mindanao, are among the few areas placed under the so-called general community quarantine status.

Malaysia: Malaysia will extend its movement control order on Top Glove Corp.'s worker dormitories in Klang for 14 days because of rising coronavirus cases. The order had been due to end Monday. The government last week ordered Top Glove to close 28 of its factories in phases, after its Klang facility recorded 1,067 Covid-19 cases out of 1,884 new daily cases in Malaysia.

Economy updates

Global: Opec will hold a second day of talks on Tuesday, as the oil producers' club hopes to reach an agreement over cuts to production. Demand has been affected by the pandemic, with the current Opec president, Abdelmadjid Attar, saying it had caused "immense challenges".

Rating agency Moody's has said that most countries still face a "significant negative shock" from the pandemic, and vaccine trials have not caused it to change its forecasts.

US: Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell is cautioning lawmakers that the US economy remains in a damaged and uncertain state, despite progress made in the development of Covid-19 vaccines.

Philippines: The Philippines is looking at subsidizing coronavirus tests for tourists to boost its pandemic-battered tourism industry that's gradually reopening to domestic travelers, Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said in an interview with ABS-CBN News Channel on Tuesday. Travel vouchers for the subsidized tests from state-run Philippine General Hospital in Manila will be given to tourists, she said, without elaborating who can qualify.

24.2 COVID-19 may in U.S. in mid-December 2019, says CDC study

Source: globaltimes.cn,2 December,2020

COVID-19 infections were present in the United States as early as mid-December 2019, weeks before it was first identified in China and about a month earlier than the first case was officially confirmed in the United States, according to a new study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

In the study published in the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases, CDC researchers tested blood samples from 7,389 routine blood donations collected by the American Red Cross from Dec. 13, 2019 to Jan. 17, 2020 for antibodies specific to the novel coronavirus, known as SARS-CoV-2.

The study aims to determine if SARS-CoV-2 reactive antibodies were present in sera prior to the first identified case in the United States on Jan. 19 this year.

The researchers found evidence of infection in 106 of 7,389 blood donations from residents in nine states across the United States.

Antibodies were found in 39 samples from California, Oregon and Washington state collected between Dec. 13 and Dec. 16, and 67 samples in Massachusetts, Michigan, Wisconsin or Iowa, and Connecticut or Rhode Island collected between Dec. 30 and Jan. 17.

The findings suggest that SARS-CoV-2 infections may have been present in the United States in December 2019, earlier than previously recognized, the authors wrote in the study.

The study also highlighted the value of screening routinely collected blood samples for evidence of viruses spreading in a population, said the researchers, adding the CDC is continuing to conduct ongoing surveillance using blood donations and clinical laboratory samples for SARS-CoV-2 infection in multiple sites across the country.

The results add to growing evidence that COVID-19 was circulating outside of China earlier than previously known.

The first COVID-19 infection in the United States was reported on Jan. 19, 2020 in a returned traveler from China, two days after domestic testing was initiated, according to the CDC.

Two other people who were subsequently diagnosed with COVID-19 in the United States also developed symptoms in mid-January.

Some reports have suggested the introduction of SARS-CoV-2 into the United States may have occurred earlier than initially recognized, though widespread community transmission was not likely until late February, according to the study.

24.3 International update: Global Covid infections near 64 million – US records 100,000 cases daily

Source: pharmaceutical-technology.com,2 December,2020

Global: coronavirus infections near 64 million. Meanwhile, the global coronavirus death toll exceeds 1.48 million according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University.

US: Covid-19 infections have passed 13.7 million, meanwhile, the US coronavirus death toll is 270,669 according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University.

The US reported more than 100,000 Covid cases a day every day of November, Johns Hopkins data shows, as it heads into a festive season marked by surging hospitalisations.

Los Angeles County on Tuesday reported a record number of new Covid cases – 7,593. The ratio of tests that come back positive almost doubled from a week ago, to 12%. Hospitalizations also rose past a previous peak in early July.

Texas posted a record 15,182 new Covid-19 diagnoses on Tuesday, breaking the old record set less than a week ago by more than 500 cases. The increase pushed the second-largest US state's cumulative total to 1.18 million, according to state health department figures. Meanwhile, virus hospitalizations exceeded 9,000 for the first time since July.

A CNN report citing internal Chinese government documents said Hubei Province had a 20-fold spike in what was identified as influenza cases in one week in early December 2019, around the same time the first symptomatic Covid-19 patients was found. One document CNN reviewed suggests China had detected around 200 Covid-19 cases in 2019. That's higher than the "44 cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology" China reported to the World Health Organization for the period up to 3 January, 2020.

India: India's daily coronavirus cases continued to stay below the 50,000 mark for the 25th straight day, with 36,604 new infections reported, data from the health ministry showed on Wednesday. The country now has 9.5 million total infections, but cases have been dipping since a peak in September, in spite of a busy festival season last month.

Germany: Germany recorded 24,766 new coronavirus cases in the 24 hours through Wednesday morning, and daily fatalities jumped to a seven-month high of 483. The rise in

infections – the biggest in six days – took the total to 1,094,678, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Vaccine news

Japan: Visitors to next year's Summer Olympics in Tokyo won't need to be vaccinated against Covid-19 before arriving, Nikkei reported. Travelers who submit proof of a negative test and use an enhanced version of Cocoa, a virus tracking app from the Japanese government, also won't be subject to a two-week quarantine, according to the report.

Mexico: Mexico's government is due to sign a contract on Wednesday with pharmaceutical company Pfizer for the delivery of its coronavirus vaccine, Deputy Health Minister Hugo Lopez-Gatell said on Tuesday. Pfizer has submitted the details about its vaccine to Mexico's health regulator, Cofepris, and the country's foreign minister last month said the government expects the vaccine to reach Mexico in December.

US: A government panel on Tuesday formally recommended early doses of Covid-19 vaccines be given first to healthcare workers and long-term care facility residents in the US, generally seen as people who live in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The US Transportation Department said Tuesday it has made preparations to enable the "immediate mass shipment" of Covid-19 vaccines and completed all necessary regulatory measures.

The first shipments of Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine will be delivered to the US on 15 December, CNN reported, citing an Operation Warp Speed document. Moderna's vaccine will arrive a week later, CNN said, adding that the distribution dates are contingent on the vaccines getting FDA clearance for emergency use.

A Roche Holding AG test that detects the presence and level of coronavirus antibodies was cleared by the US Food and Drug Administration for emergency use. The test could be used to evaluate how well the shots work, including over time, Roche said in a statement announcing the approval. Like other antibody tests, the assay could also be used to identify potential plasma donors. The use of so-called convalescent plasma to treat people hospitalized with Covid-19 was granted emergency authorization by the FDA earlier this year.

Turkey: Turkey has plans for "widespread" Covid-19 vaccination and will prioritize medical personnel, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said. The country will receive up to 20 million doses this month, followed by another 20 million doses in January and 10 million in February.

Lockdown updates

UK: Prime Minister Boris Johnson suffered his worst-ever Commons rebellion on Tuesday night, as 55 Conservative MPs opposed the government's new coronavirus tier system. The UK's month-long lockdown ends on Wednesday, 2 December.

England's new three tier system comes into effect on 2 December. Non-essential shops in all areas can reopen, as can gyms, hairdressers and other personal care businesses, with the formal instruction to stay at home coming to an end. The "rule of six" will again apply for outdoor gatherings in all areas.

US: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will soon shorten the length of self-quarantine recommended after potential exposure to the coronavirus to 10 days, or 7 days with a negative test, a federal spokesperson said on Tuesday. CDC currently recommends a 14-day quarantine in order to curb the transmission of the virus.

Hong Kong: Hong Kong's de facto cabinet has agreed to raise the fine for breaking social distancing rules to HK$10,000 from HK$2,000, the South China Morning Post reported, citing unidenfitied people. The increase is subject to input from the Department of Justice, according to the newspaper. The city faces 103 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, up from 82 the day before, the SCMP said. Hong Kong has ratcheted up curbs on clubs, bars and restaurants in the past week, and has also closed schools.

Indonesia: Indonesia shortened its year-end holiday by three days to stem the virus spread and avoid a repeat of a long weekend in October that led to a spike in cases.

Vietnam: Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc ordered the aviation authority to halt international commercial flights after the nation reported its first local coronavirus cases in almost three months.

Economy updates

US: UnitedHealth Group Inc. expects the pandemic to carve $2 billion out of its profits next year, with Covid-19 testing and treatment costs remaining steady even as more Americans return to their doctors' offices for routine care.

Executives said costs for virus testing and treatment won't be offset by widespread deferrals in care in 2021, as they were in 2020 when U.S. medical providers shut down most non-urgent in-person care for weeks during the spring.

24.4 Pakistan reports 3,795 new COVID-19 cases, positivity rate hits record 9.71 per cent

Source: newindianexpress.com,7 December,2020

The country also reported 37 more deaths in one day, pushing the number of fatalities across Pakistan to 8,398.

A health worker takes a nasal swab sample at a screening center for coronavirus, in Lahore, Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's coronavirus positivity rate hit a record 9.71 per cent on Monday as 3,795 new COVID-19 cases were detected, taking the nationwide tally to 420,294, the health ministry said.

The country also reported 37 more deaths in one day, pushing the number of fatalities across Pakistan to 8,398.

A total of 2,539 are in critical conditions, said the Ministry of National Health Services.

After carrying out 39,076 tests in the last 24 hour, the national tally of cases reached 420,294, it said.

The previous record for positivity rate was 8.53 per cent recorded on November 29 at the beginning of the start of the second wave of the coronavirus, it added.

At least 356,542 people have recovered in the country, and the number of active patients is 55,354.

Sindh has reported 184,486 cases, Punjab 123,762, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa 49,676, Islamabad 32,816, Balochistan 17,466, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir 7,356 and Gilgit-Baltistan 4,732 cases.

As Pakistan struggled to combat the second wave, it got an offer from Russia to provide its COVID-10 vaccine, Foreign Officer Spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri.

He said the proposal has been forwarded to the health ministry, which is looking at the vaccine's efficacy, regulations and results.

Chaudhri also added that the government was in contact with multiple sources to ensure "timely acquisition of COVID-19 vaccine".

Pakistan already allocated an initial amount of USD 150 million to procure the vaccine.

Officials said that it would be available by April.

24.5 Covid lockdown causes record drop in CO2 emissions: Study

**Source:** telanganatoday.com,11 December,2020

According to the report, by December 2020, emissions from road transport and aviation were still below their 2019 levels, by approximately 10 per cent and 40 per cent.

London: The global Covid-19 lockdowns caused fossil carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions to decline by an estimated 2.4 billion tonne in 2020 – a record drop, say researchers.

The fall is considerably larger than previous significant decreases – 0.5 (in 1981 and 2009), 0.7 (1992), and 0.9 (1945) billion tonne of CO_2 ($GtCO_2$).

"It means that in 2020 fossil CO_2 emissions are predicted to be approximately 34 $GtCO_2$, seven per cent lower than in 2019," said study author from University of East Anglia (UEA), University of Exeter and the Global Carbon Project.

In India, where fossil CO_2 emissions are projected to decrease about nine per cent, emissions were already lower than normal in late 2019 because of economic turmoil and strong hydropower generation, and the Covid-19 effect is potentially superimposed on this changing trend.
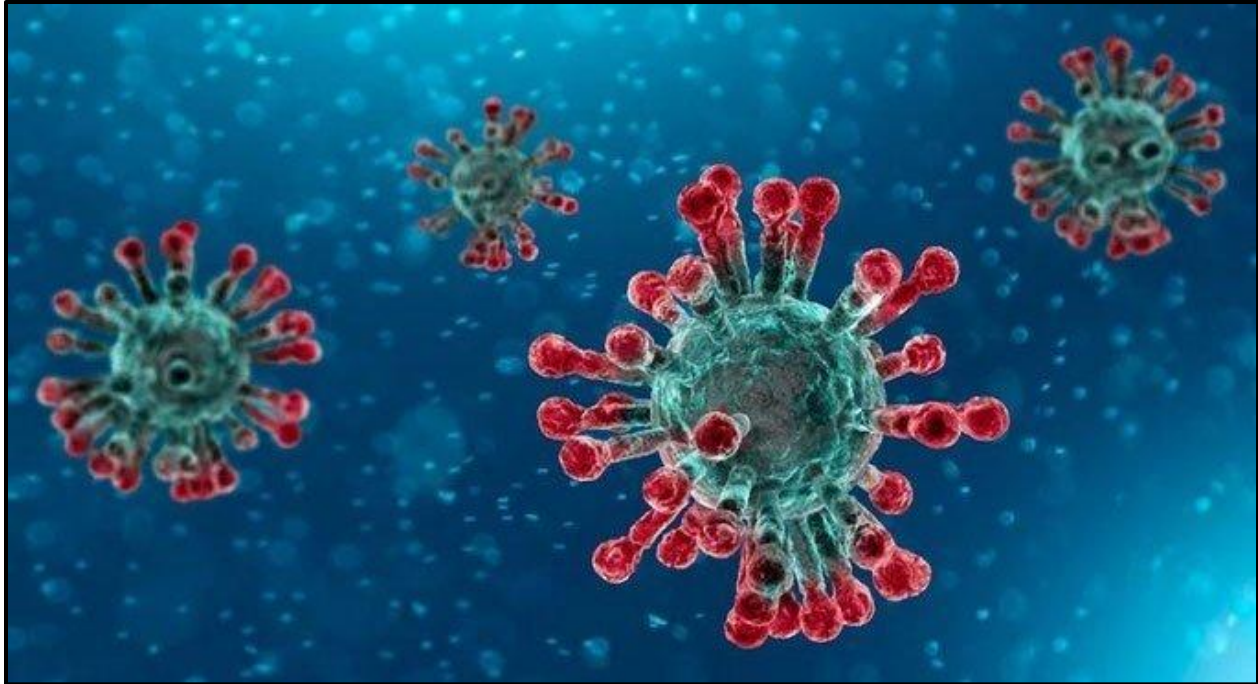
The emissions decrease appears more pronounced in the US (-12 per cent) and EU27 countries (-11 per cent), where Covid-19 restrictions accelerated previous reductions in emissions from coal use.

It appears least pronounced in China (-1.7 per cent), where the effect of Covid-19 restrictions on emissions occurred on top of rising emissions.

In the UK, which first introduced lockdown measures in March, emissions are projected to decrease by about 13 per cent.

For the rest of the world, the effect of Covid-19 restrictions occurred on top of rising emissions, with emissions this year projected to decrease by about 7 per cent.

According to the report, by December 2020, emissions from road transport and aviation were still below their 2019 levels, by approximately 10 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively, due to continuing restrictions.

Despite lower emissions in 2020, the level of CO_2 in the atmosphere continues to grow – by about 2.5 parts per million (ppm) in 2020 – and is projected to reach 412 ppm averaged over the year, 48 per cent above pre-industrial levels.

"Although global emissions were not as high as last year, they still amounted to about 39 billion tonnes of CO_2, and inevitably led to a further increase in CO_2 in the atmosphere," said lead researcher Pierre Friedlingstein from the University of Exeter in the UK

"The atmospheric CO2 level, and consequently the world's climate, will only stabilise when global CO2 emissions are near zero," Friedlingstein noted.

24.6 South Korea Prepares for Its Worst COVID-19 Scenario Yet

Source: thediplomat.com,15 December,2020

A medical worker wearing protective gear takes sample from a woman during a COVID-19 testing at a coronavirus testing site in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2020

Seoul has hesitated to tighten restrictions thus far, even as health authorities predict the number of daily cases might top 1,000.

In the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea tightened restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus. The number of cases declined and the country was applauded by the international community as a rare success story in grappling with the pandemic.

However, South Korea is now preparing to take its toughest and strongest measures yet to curb a resurgence of the virus.

South Korea recorded from 100 to 200 daily cases of COVID-19 in early November, but now the number hovers around 800 to 1,000 despite the government's tightening restrictions over two months.

In a meeting on December 13, President Moon Jae-in asked people to refrain from meeting up or even leaving home as much as possible as the country faces its most difficult battle with COVID-19.

"This is the biggest crisis since the country confirmed the [first] case of the virus. It is a very serious and extraordinary situation," Moon said, demanding that government and

quarantine officials concentrate on utilizing all quarantine capabilities and administrative power to prevent the spread of the virus.

Under its own guidelines, the government should have raised its social distancing level from 2 or 2.5 to 3, the highest of the five-tier system. But the government did not raise the level over the weekend, even while the daily number of cases hit 1,030 on Sunday.

Moon said that raising the social distancing level to 3 is a last resort but asked quarantine authorities to prepare for that step just in case.

The Korea Medical Association and experts asked the quarantine authorities to temporarily raise social distancing measures to level 3 in early December, in order to decrease the number of daily confirmed cases. However, the government at the time did not seriously consider taking more aggressive measures due to the possible negative effect on the economy.

Under level 3 social distancing restrictions, most indoor and outdoor facilities will be closed. Those that remain open will have strict limitations.

Alongside the resurgence of the pandemic, Jung Eun-kyeong, commissioner of the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, has been sharing her predictions on the number of cases that could occur in upcoming weeks. Her predictions have been proven right thus far – and Jung shared another prediction on December 14.

"It is a very stringent situation that we are in a full-scale pandemic. Based on the number of patients, we are predicting from 950 to 1,200 patients will be confirmed [daily]," Jung said.

The government has been slow to tighten restrictions to the maximum extent because it does not want the economy – and particularly small business owners – to be harshly affected. However, its inconsistent approach has created loopholes, giving the public the chance to find ways to gather even as country faces a resurgence of COVID-19.

Under the current restriction level, indoor sports facilities such as driving ranges and fitness centers are closed but movie theaters and internet cafes are able to operate. People can meet each other and spend time together after checking their temperatures, providing personal information through QR codes, and sitting apart inside in available facilities.

Even the restrictions that were in place had some odd exceptions: Gym facilities for boxing and Muay Thai were allowed to open while kickboxing gyms were closed. Similarly, people are no longer permitted to stay inside a café if they are only drinking a beverage, like coffee. But they are free to stay inside if they order food, such as toast or cake. Customers can also eat at restaurants, but they should be closed after 9 p.m. (unless they don't take orders for delivery).

"Applying different standards to indoor facilities depending on the type of the businesses does not make any sense," Cho Yong-woo, 24, a company worker in Bucheon, west of Seoul, told The Diplomat. "I think restaurants and cafes should be operated with the same guidelines amid the pandemic."

So far, the government's approach has been to apply restrictions piece by piece, based on the number of confirmed cases. But some argue that every indoor facility should be closed, as the government has struggled to make its classifications clear amid people's questions.

Meanwhile, more and more COVID-19 patients have been admitted to hospitals and medical centers since November. There is not enough capacity in medical centers and hospitals to treat severely ill patients who tested positive for coronavirus.

In the greater Seoul area, just four of 43 hospital beds for severely ill patients are now available for treatment. Hundreds of patients in the area are waiting in their homes to be transferred to designated medical centers for treatment, according to data from quarantine officials. More beds are available in other areas, but that is of little help, as more than 60 percent of COVID-19 cases in South Korea have happened in Seoul and the greater Seoul area.

To prevent the worst-case situation of patients getting sicker in their homes with no access to treatment in medical centers and hospitals, Gyeonggi Province Governor Lee Jae-myung issued executive orders over the weekend to immediately use a dormitory of Kyonggi University as a temporary medical center for patients. More such measures are likely to be taken if the number of cases keeps rising.

The Korea Nurses Association posted an urgent employment notice on December 10 to recruit nurses who can work immediately in places where coronavirus patients have been getting treatment. In four days, 1,410 nurses volunteered to support those who have been working on the frontlines against COVID-19, according to the association.

"At this moment when the coronavirus pandemic re-emerged, nurses who voluntarily apply to work are giving hope to the people exhausted by the virus," said Shin Kyung-lim, head of the association.

As of midnight on December 14, South Korea's total caseload had climbed to 44,364, with 600 deaths. Of the 880 new coronavirus cases reported that day, 848 cases were locally transmitted and 32 were imported. About 70 percent of the local cases were caused in Seoul and the greater Seoul area.

24.7 U.S approves Moderna to be country's second COVID-19 vaccine

Source: newsfirst.lk,19 December,2020

Moderna has been approved by the US government as the country's second Covid-19 vaccine, clearing the way for millions of doses to be released.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized the US-made jab about a week after approving a Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine which is now being distributed.

The US has agreed to purchase 200 million doses of Moderna, and six million may be ready to ship now.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the country has the world's highest numbers of COVID-19 deaths and cases.

FDA commissioner Stephen Hahn said the emergency approval of the vaccine on Friday marked "another crucial step in the fight against this global pandemic that is causing vast numbers of hospitalizations and deaths in the United States each day".

24.8 South Africa struggles to contain second Covid wave with new strain

Source: theguardian.com,22 December,2020

Variant similar to that in UK appears to be causing faster spread than during first wave

South Africa is struggling to contain a second wave of Covid-19 infections which appears to be driven by a new and more infectious variant of the disease, similar to that in the UK.

A nurse from Lancet Nectare hospital carries out a coronavirus test in Richmond, Johannesburg

Scientists and officials have warned the country's 56 million people that the new variant, referred to as 501.V2, carries a heavier viral load and appears to be more prevalent among the young.

"It is still very early but at this stage, the preliminary data suggests the virus that is now dominating in the second wave is spreading faster than the first wave," Prof Salim Abdool Karim, the chairman of the government's ministerial advisory committee (MAC), said.

South Africa may see "many more cases" in the new wave than it experienced earlier this year, Abdool Karim said.

Prof Ian Sanne, a member of the MAC, said the variant detected in South Africa was not the same as that identified in the UK.

"There are two different viruses but they are different variants of the same strain of the coronavirus," Sanne told local media.

Five countries, including Switzerland and Germany, have banned flights from South Africa to stop the spread of the variant.

South Africa has recorded 931,000 cases of Covid-19, with almost 25,000 deaths, according to official statistics. Excess mortality studies suggest a death toll of more than 56,000.

After a first wave peaked in July and August, the daily total for new cases fell dramatically. However, the number of new infections began to rise steeply at the beginning of December, reaching 11,000 earlier this week.

Dr Richard Lessells, a leading infectious disease expert in South Africa, said it was still unclear how effective existing vaccines would be against the variant. Another concern was the possibility of reinfection of people who had already caught Covid-19.

"There are a few more concerns with our variant [than that in the UK] for the vaccine ... But we are now doing the careful, methodical work in the lab to answer all the questions we have, and that takes time," he said.

South Africa has more than 8,500 people being treated in hospital with Covid-19, surpassing the previous high of 8,300 recorded in August.

In the Western Cape province, once a popular destination for holidaymakers and tourists, private and public hospitals are filling fast.

The province's current seven-day average for new infections is 2,950, substantially more than the most intense period of the first wave when it was 1,623. More than one in three tests carried out in the province are positive.

Researchers say the South African variant emerged in Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape province, where healthcare services are among the weakest in the country.

"This lineage spread rapidly, becoming within weeks the dominant lineage in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces. Whilst the full significance of the mutations is yet to be determined, the genomic data, showing the rapid displacement of other lineages, suggest that this lineage may be associated with increased transmissibility," a research paper published this week said.

Vaccines for between 3% and 10% of the population are unlikely to be available for at least six months, experts believe.

The South African government has so far responded with only very limited control measures – cutting days and hours for the trade of alcohol, imposing greater restrictions on mass gatherings and closing a number of popular beaches. Officials have renewed calls for the wearing of face masks, social distancing and hand-washing. Few local experts believe such measures alone will be able to restrain the spread of the variant, but the government's options are limited. A strict lockdown in March slowed the outbreak but at a very high economic and social cost. There have been more than 2.5 million confirmed cases of Covid-

19 on the African continent – with more than 2 million recoveries and 59,000 deaths cumulatively, according to the World Health Organization.

24.9 Fearing new COVID-19 strain, Japan bans entry for foreigners starting Monday

Source: newindianexpress.com,26 December,2020

On Friday, Japan has registered the first cases of the new strain of the coronavirus. The country is also seeing record daily infections of the original coronavirus for the fourth day on end.

People wearing face masks to help curb the spread of the coronavirus walk around the scrambled intersection at the Shibuya shopping district in Tokyo

TOKYO: Japan will suspend entry for foreigners starting Monday to contain the spread of a new strain of COVID-19 first discovered in the UK, the Kyodo news agency reported.

On Friday, Japan has registered the first cases of the new strain of the coronavirus. The country is also seeing record daily infections of the original coronavirus for the fourth day on end.

The media outlet stressed that all Japanese nationals would be obliged to submit negative COVID-19 test results received within 72 hours before their departure from any country

that had confirmed cases of the mutant virus. Moreover, passengers would have to pass another COVID-19 test upon their arrival in Japan.

The government added that the entry ban would not apply to the businessmen and students from 10 countries, including Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea and Taiwan, with which Japan had reached an agreement regarding the issue.

The media also noted that the government had decided to suspend the issuance of new visas from Monday.

Last week, the UK announced that a new coronavirus strain was detected in the country, with the new variant 70 percent more transmissible than other SARS-CoV-2 variants. After the news emerged, many countries suspended travel to and from the UK. However, there is no evidence that the new strain is more pathogenic. The cases of the new variant of the virus have been reported by a number of countries, including Denmark, Singapore and Spain.

On Thursday, Japan refused entries from the United Kingdom to everyone, except for Japanese citizens and foreign long-term residents due to risks associated with the discovery of the new coronavirus strain.

24.10 Why masks will stay even after Covid-19 vaccination

Source: hindustantimes.com,29 December,2020

India plans to begin vaccinating 300 million health workers, frontline workers and vulnerable populations as early as January next year, but vaccines do not signal the end of public health precautions for the vaccinated.

A tumultuous 2020 that upended how we lived our lives appears to be ending on a happier note with several countries beginning vaccination against coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in December.

The news of the Sars-CoV2 variant in the UK that spreads faster is a dampener but virologists say so far it is not known to cause more severe disease and is unlikely to impact the effectiveness of existing vaccines, diagnostic tests, or treatments.

It's still unknown how much protection Covid-19 vaccines provide in real-life conditions and for how long this protection lasts

"There is no need to change the existing treatment protocol in view of mutations emerging in the strain. Further, since Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has always advocated use of two or more gene assays for testing Sars-CoV-2, it is unlikely to miss infected cases using the current testing strategy," concluded experts at the meeting of the National Task Force on Covid-19 on Saturday under co-chairs of Dr Vinod Paul, member Niti Aayog, and Dr Balram Bhargava, director general, ICMR.

India plans to begin vaccinating 300 million health workers, frontline workers and vulnerable populations as early as January next year, but vaccines do not signal the end of public health precautions for the vaccinated.

Reducing exposure to the virus by wearing masks, observing social distancing and frequently washing hands will remain the mainstay of social behaviour in 2021 and beyond, till everyone has been vaccinated against the disease that sickened at least 80 million and killed 1.75 million globally since the start of the pandemic in China last year.

Though not yet approved in India, all three approved vaccines– Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca-Oxford – are given in two doses four weeks apart and it takes six to eight weeks after the initial dose to achieve the desired immunity for protection. So, those vaccinated will have to continue using behaviours that reduce their risk of exposure to the virus.

It's still unknown how much protection Covid-19 vaccines provide in real-life conditions and for how long this protection lasts. What is known is that everyone can get vaccinated only by 2024. Since the herd immunity threshold for Covid-19 has not been established, we still cannot say how much of the world's population will have to be vaccinated to stop the spread of infection to those who have not been vaccinated.

The effectiveness of the vaccine will also depend on whether it is stored and transported at optimal temperature. it will also depend on health of the recipients since the "warp speed" of development limited human trials data to mostly to healthy adults and those with stable pre-existing diseases.

Again, Covid-19 vaccines have only been tested for their ability to prevent infection and not for prevention of transmission. Most vaccines prevent infection and stop its spread, but some, like the annual flu vaccines, protect those vaccinated from severe disease but don't always stop them from infecting unvaccinated people.

Vaccines train the body's immune cells to the virus to prevent infection but how effective these immune cells are in crossing the mucous barrier to destroy the viruses resting in the nose is still unknown. If viruses in the nose remain viable, those vaccinated can shed them while speaking or sneezing to infect unvaccinated people in close contact.

Vaccines apart, a major upside of 2020 has been the demonstration of unparalleled heroism and resilience amid monumental adversity. Everyone did their bit. Health and frontline workers worked overtime in unsafe conditions to save lives, people stayed locked up at home for months to slow the spread of disease, children gave up school and play, jobless migrants trudged home for days and weeks to escape hunger, and scientists, industry, global agencies and nations forged unprecedented partnerships and worked overtime to make it possible to bring new treatments and vaccines to people within nine months.

As a result, the year that began on a sick note following the World Health Organization's Country Office (WHO) in China discovering a statement about a mysterious "viral pneumonia" of unknown origin on the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission website on December 31, 2019, is ending with hope for a return to normalcy in the not-so-distant future.

The current wave in India appears to be waning, with the seven-day daily average for new infections staying below 25,000, down from a single day peak of 97,399 on September 10. Add to this results of antibodies surveys that indicate around 200-300 million have some degree of immunity against Sas-CoV2 and we have a momentum that can help get our derailed lives and economy on track by next summer. But this can happen only if we

continue to take precautions and ensure the year-end holidays don't turn into superspreading events.

24.11 AstraZeneca's COVID-19 Vaccine Approved by United Kingdom Regulator

Source: guwahatiplus.com,30 December,2020

GUWAHATI: The COVID-19 vaccine designed by scientists at the University of Oxford has been approved for use in the United Kingdom (UK).

The vaccine candidate from Oxford-AstraZeneca has been approved for emergency use in the UK. Britain had granted emergency use approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in the month of December.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock told Sky News that the vaccination will be rolled out from 4th of January 2021.

"It has been given the go-ahead by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)," the secretary further stated.

"Government has today accepted the recommendation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to authorize Oxford University/AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine for use," said UK government as reported by ANI.

Notes

All queries and feedback regarding this newsletter should be addressed to:

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