

“Pandemic Coronavirus”

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PANDEMIC CORONAVIRUS

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease which is generally caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), previously known as 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), a strain of coronavirus. The first case of coronavirus disease was seen in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Common symptoms of coronavirus disease are Fever, Dry cough, breathing difficulty, Running nose, Sore throat, etc. About 80% of confirmed positive cases recover from the disease without any serious complications. In severe cases, infection can cause severe pneumonia and other complications and, in few cases, it may even cause death depending upon the personal health conditions of each and every human body.

COVID-19 spreads mainly by droplets produced as a result of coughing or sneezing of a coronavirus infected person. This can happen through direct close contact (within one meter of an infected person) and Indirect contact (touching any infected surfaces or cloth and then touching one’s mouth, nose or eyes). The incubation period of COVID-19 (time between getting infection and showing symptoms) is one (1) to fourteen (14) days.

To mitigate the risks involved with this dangerous disease, several countries and their cities are put into lockdown, placing quarantine measures on the entire population. People are advised to avoid social gatherings and travelling to different countries and cities to avoid further spread of the disease. These limitations are leading to business slowdown in some industries while shutdown in some of the industries and there are some industries that are least affected. The industries that are mostly affected due to COVID-19 are Technological industries, Insurance sector, Sports and Entertainment sector, Travel and Tourism industries, Retail and eCommerce sector, Fintech sector, etc. The industries/sectors that are least affected by coronavirus are pharmaceutical industries, Banking department, Cargo sector, FMCG (Fast Moving consumer Goods), Petroleum sector, Agriculture sector, etc.

With over 7,40,000 confirmed cases in which around 1,56,000 had been recovered and around 35,000 deaths across 200 countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) has officially declared it as ‘pandemic’ on March 11, 2020. WHO had declared pandemic last in 2009 for H1N1 influenza outbreak. WHO strategic objectives for coronavirus are:

- It limits the human-to-human transmission including reducing secondary infections among close contacts.

- Communicate critical risk and event information to all the communities and counter misinformation.
- Identifies, isolate and care for patients early, including providing optimized care for infected patients.
- Address crucial unknowns regarding clinical severity, extent of transmission and infection, treatment options, and accelerate the development of diagnostics and vaccines.
- Minimizes social and economic impact through multisectoral partnerships.
- Identifies and reduces transmission from the animal source.

The basic recommendations by WHO to reduce the general risk of transmission of coronavirus includes:

- To totally avoid close contact with all the people suffering from this disease.
- Frequently washing of hand, especially after direct contact with the coronavirus affected person;
- Avoid unprotected contact with farm or wild animals;
- Within healthcare facilities, it enhances standard infection prevention and control practices in hospitals, especially in emergency departments;
- People with symptoms of coronavirus should cover while coughing and sneezing.

WHO country office for India has been working closely with MoHFW on preparation and response measures for COVID-19. They also look for laboratory diagnosis, risk communication and community engagements, implementation of containment plan, surveillance and contact tracing, infection prevention and control and hospital preparation.

“India stands out at an important turning point in its fight against Coronavirus. It is always noticed that extraordinary situations always demand extraordinary measures. The PM of India has taken bold and decisive steps to break the chain of transmission. It is equally important that this window is used for ramping up measures to find, isolate, test, treat and trace. WHO stands together in solidarity with India and its people and is committed to provide all the support that is needed,” says Dr. Henk Bekedam, WHO representative to India.

The union government and the state governments are constitutionally empowered to legislate upon the matters related to public health. The union law deals with the port quarantine, including seaman’s and marine hospitals, and interstate quarantine. State governments may provide matters related to public health and sanitation, hospitals, dispensaries, and prevention of animal diseases. The union and state governments have concurrent jurisdiction to prevent transmission one state to another of infectious diseases or pests affecting humans, animals, or plants.

Section 2A of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 empowers the union government to take necessary measures and prescribe regulations to deals with the dangerous epidemic disease at

ports of entry and exit. Under section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, states are empowered to take necessary measures and prescribe regulations to deal with epidemic within their jurisdiction. Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 states that any person who disobeys any regulation or order made under this Act shall be charged with an offence under Indian Penal Code, 1860 and the convict shall be liable to a sentence of simple imprisonment for one (1) month, a fine, or both. Under section 4 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 states that no legal proceeding will be initiated against any person or authority for anything done, or in good faith intended to be done.

On the directions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a high-level group of ministers (GOM) was “constituted to review, monitor and evaluate the preparedness and measures taken regarding management” of coronavirus disease in the country. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) coordinate the efforts of the central government “in order to mitigate the impact of the outbreak of COVID-19 in India.” On March 11, 2020 the GOM decided that the MoHFW shall advise all states and union territories to invoke section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897. On the same day the union government invoked section 69 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, to delegate the power of the Home Secretary, who is Chairman of National Executive Committee (NEC), which is a coordinating and monitoring body for disaster management, to the Secretary of the MoHFW. On March 14, 2020 the union government declared coronavirus (COVID-19) as a notified disaster and assistance of which is available under the State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF), established under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Due to outbreak of coronavirus disease in India, various states and union territories has imposed some laws to minimize the effect of COVID-19.

In Maharashtra, on March 20, 2020 the state government announced the closure of workplaces, excluding essential service and public transport until March 31. On March 22, 2020 the Maharashtra government impose section 144 across the state, putting the state into lockdown and on March 23, 2020 the state government-imposed curfew across the state.

In Punjab, on march 20, 2020 the state government shuts down public transport until March 31 and on March 23, 2020 Punjab was the first state to impose full curfew across the state.

In Rajasthan, the state government-imposed section 144 on March 19, 2020 and on March 22, 2020 the Rajasthan government banned public transport and on March 23, 2020 the state banned all private transport also as the COVID-19 cases crossed 32 in the state.

In Delhi, the state government announced closure of schools, colleges, cinema hall and all public places until March 31 and on March 22, 2020 the Delhi government imposed complete lockdown.

On March 22, 2020 the Prime Minister Narendra Modi requested Janta curfew across the country and in exercise of the powers under section 6(2)(i) of the Disaster Management Act,

2005 issued an order for states and union territories prescribing lockdown for containment of COVID-19 epidemic in the country for 21 days with effect from March 25, 2020.

Below are the steps taken by central government across the country to control the spread of coronavirus disease:

- India's response to coronavirus has been pre-emptive, pro-active and is graded with high-level political commitment and a 'whole government' approach to respond to this pandemic.
- All incoming and outgoing international flights as well as domestic flights have been suspended till April 14, 2020.
- WHO country office for India is working with MoHFW to strengthen surveillance, build capacity of health system and optimize window of opportunity created by physical distancing in India.
- Indian Railways passed an order that the period from march 22, 2020 to April 14, 2020 will be treated as 'Force Majeure.' The central government have suspended all the trains across the country except luggage trains till April 14, 2020.

Various state governments are providing financial assistance to compensate businesses, persons, especially daily wages workers. The administrations are providing guidelines for safety and security of those who are running the health services, financial, transport and water supply services, sanitation services, etc.

In Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath government has announced a package of over Rs. 353 crores to daily wages workers. The state has also decided to provide free food grains for April and May to widows, old age people and handicapped pensioners. Moreover, the state government has requested the central government to sanction Rs. 556 crores for the payment towards the jobs rendered by beneficiaries under MGNREGA.

In Punjab, the state government has announced a sum of Rs. 96 crores for the registered construction workers amounting Rs. 3000 each and a sum of Rs. 20 crores from Chief Minister Relief Fund for providing free food and medicine to the needy people. Punjab Health Minister has requested the centre to release Rs. 150 crores for building isolation wards to treat coronavirus patients.

In Haryana, the state government announced that the Haryana board of Construction Workers who is not registered under Mukhya Mantri Parivar Samriddhi Scheme will be provided a sum of Rs. 4500 per month on weekly basis. The state government also announced setting up of Haryana Corona Relief Fund (HCRF) and appealed to people to donate, as he himself donated Rs. 500,000 from his personal account.

In Kerala, the Kerala government has announced to facilitate loans worth Rs. 2000 crores through a self-help group 'kadumbashree'. Another Rs. 2000 crore will be distributed as Village Employment Assurance Programme for April and May. Food grains will be provided

to all the families whether they are below poverty line or not. The Kerala government has already declared Rs. 20,000 crores special package to overcome from coronavirus disease.

In Delhi, Delhi government has promised to pay salaries for all staff, daily wage staff and guest teachers employed at places which have been closed in view of the coronavirus. Manish Sisodia the Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister said “the novel coronavirus was causing terrible financial stress to the poor and announced that those receiving ration from fair-price shops would get 50 per cent extra for next month.” The government further also announced that GST would be waived off to make everything more affordable for those who are in need.

From the last 50 years the development of many different coronaviruses that has caused a wide variety of human and veterinary diseases has occurred. It is likely that these viruses will continue to emerge and to evolve in humans.

Due to the lack of solutions/vaccines/medicines, the only best measures to control human coronaviruses is to maintain a strong public health surveillance system along with the fast diagnostic testing and quarantine when necessary.

Our Indian Government is taking all possible and necessary steps to ensure that we are prepared well to face the upcoming challenges and threat posed by the growing pandemic of COVID 19 – the Corona Virus. With active and constant support of the people we have been able to contain the spread of the Virus in our country. The most significant factor in avoiding the spread of the Virus locally is to empower the citizens with the right information and taking protections as per the advisories being issued by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.