

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESEARCH**

**LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2658
TO BE ANSWERED ON 04THAUGUST, 2023**

COVID-19 TESTING

2658.SHRI PARBHUBHAI NAGARBHAI VASAVA:

Will the Minister of **HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE** be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of the role played by the Government in COVID-19 testing across the country particularly in tribal areas;
- (b) the number of institutions identified for testing activities for COVID-19 by the Government across the country particularly in the rural areas;
- (c) whether it is a fact that a number of institutions have been provided with financial support by the Government as testing centers for COVID-19 tests during the last 5 years and the current year; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor, year-wise?

ANSWER

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
(PROF. S.P. SINGH BAGHEL)**

(a): The Government of India has played a crucial role in COVID-19 testing across the country, including in tribal areas. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) an autonomous body under Department of Health Research has made concerted efforts to strengthen and diversify testing capabilities, which proved crucial in meeting India's increased testing demands during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of these efforts, numerous testing facilities have been established nationwide, even in tribal areas, to enhance testing capacity and accessibility. The testing infrastructure comprises both government-run and private laboratories, working together to conduct COVID-19 testing efficiently.

As per the ICMR database, a total of 977 COVID-19 testing facilities/centers are located in tribal districts (denoted the population consists of more than 50% tribal communities). These facilities/centers played a significant role in ensuring that testing services reach even the most remote and vulnerable areas, thereby contributing to the country's overall pandemic response and control measures.

Further, ICMR issued testing guidelines time to time depending on the situation, to prioritize different categories of individuals for testing, including those with COVID-19 symptoms, high-risk contacts, healthcare workers, and other frontline workers. As the pandemic progressed, ICMR worked on scaling up the testing capacities across the country including the tribal areas. ICMR took initiatives for the validation

of COVID-19 testing kits in order to reduce imports and make affordable diagnostic kits available, aiming to bring down the test cost.

(b) to (d): There are 3278 operational testing laboratories reporting to ICMR as on 27/07/2023. These facilities are spread to encompass all parts of the country, facilitating testing in urban, rural, tribal areas, and even the remotest locations. This widespread distribution allows easy access to testing services for the population, aiding in the early detection and containment of COVID-19 cases.

Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, has been implementing a central sector scheme "Setting-up of a nation-wide network of laboratories for managing epidemics and national calamities". The primary objective of this scheme is to establish a network of Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDLs) across the country for timely diagnosis and identification of viruses, including COVID-19, and conducting outbreak investigations. The labs established under this scheme receive ongoing support and resources to ensure their continuous operation and contribution to public health efforts.

152 labs were established & supported upto 2022-23. The expenditure incurred under the scheme in the last 5 years is as follows:

S.No.	Years	Total expenditure (Rs. in Crores)
1.	2018-19	52.14
2.	2019-20	69.37
3.	2020-21	81.89
4.	2021-22	75.79
5.	2022-23	69.98
