

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

**LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.467
TO BE ANSWERED ON 04TH FEBRUARY, 2022**

RESEARCH ON POTENTIAL FUTURE VARIANTS OF COVID-19

**467. SHRI K. MURALEEDHARAN:
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SHRIMATI NUSRAT JAHAN RUHI:**

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

- (a) whether the Government has taken cognizance of the alarming rise in the COVID-19 cases across the country, if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether the Government is prioritising research on potential future variants of the virus;
- (c) if so, the details thereof including budgetary allocations made toward research and development, and if not, the reasons therefor;
- (d) whether the Government plans to start administration of booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines, to the 18+ years population, if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor;
- (e) the manner in which the Government is ensuring accurate data on the number of cases given the increasing usage of home tests; and
- (f) whether the Government intends to increase the rate of institutional testing and if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

**ANSWER
THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY
WELFARE
(DR. BHARATI PRAVIN PAWAR)**

- (a) Government of India continues to keep a close watch over COVID-19 situation in the country against COVID-19 to prevent and mitigate the impact of any resurgence of COVID-19 trajectory in the country.

Also, Government of India is supporting States in their endeavor to manage COVID-19 since the beginning of pandemic. Given the emergence of mutated variants with variable impact on transmissibility, virulence and effectiveness of vaccines, likelihood of resurgence of COVID-19 trajectory in the country is monitored by various expert committees under Indian Council of Medical Research, Directorate General of Health Services and other relevant Ministries/Departments. Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare continues to keep a close watch over COVID-19 situation across the country and globally.

Besides regular review meetings at the level of Union Health Minister with all relevant stakeholders including subject experts, review meetings with States/UTs through video conferencing have been conducted under Union Health Minister and senior officials of Health Ministry to review preparedness and response measures for COVID-19 pandemic. States/Union Territories (UTs) have been repeatedly urged to undertake the following activities:

- Strict monitoring of International travelers in the community.
- Contact tracing of positive individuals & follow up for 14 days. Genome sequencing of positive samples through INSACOG Labs in a prompt manner.
- Continued monitoring of areas where cluster of positive cases emerges.
- Further strengthening of COVID-19 testing infrastructure and ensuring early identification of cases through adequate testing across the States. Ensuring preparedness of health infrastructure (availability of ICU, oxygen supported beds, ventilators, etc.) and upgrading health infrastructure under 'India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness-Phase II' (ECRP-II) including in rural areas and for pediatric cases.
- Commissioning PSA plants, ensuring sufficient logistics, drugs etc.
- Ensuring COVID-19 vaccination for the eligible population including coverage among young adolescents (15-18 years) and precaution dose for health care workers, frontline workers and elderly with comorbidities.
- Ensuring adherence to COVID Appropriate Behaviour.

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) vide letter dated 28th June 2021 has circulated to all States/UTs guiding principles for imposition of restrictions or allowing relaxation in context of COVID-19 based on COVID-19 testing confirmation rates and hospital bed occupancy rates. This has been reiterated by Ministry of Home Affairs under Disaster Management Act, 2005 vide order dated 29th June 2021.

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare continues to provide technical guidance for managing various aspects of COVID-19. To disseminate various clinical guidelines for appropriate management of cases, a series of webinars were held under MoHFW's Center of Excellence initiative for all State Level Centers of Excellence and district level public and private COVID health facilities in collaboration with AIIMS, Delhi and Indian Medical Association.

Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare continues to provide support to States/UTs to enhance preparedness and response capacities against COVID-19 and other public health emergencies. Funding support is also provided to States/UTs through National Health Mission, State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF) and Emergency COVID-19 Response and Preparedness packages. Under ECRP Phase II, a package of Rs. 23,123 crores has been approved to upgrade health infrastructure including maintaining buffer stock of essential drugs.

(b) The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG), jointly initiated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Department of Biotechnology (DBT) with Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), is a consortium of laboratories to monitor the genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2. This consortium has 52 laboratories.

(c) To aid in future research and development under the PM Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM- ABHIM) scheme, Rs. 1670 Crores for the period 2021-22 to 2025-26 has been year marked. Further, a budget of Rs. 60.18 Crores has been released to the surveillance for SARS – COV-2 in India project by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

(d) The administration of precaution doses to Health Care Workers, Front Line Workers and persons aged 60 years and above has started under National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme from 10th January, 2022. Any decision on extension of eligible beneficiaries for precaution dose is as per the recommendations of The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI) on the basis of review of available scientific evidences.

(e) Before approval of all home test kits, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) ensures that each manufacturer develops a robust mobile app for data capture and report generation of each home test conducted. ICMR also sends periodic reminders to all home test kit manufacturers to ensure data capture. Simple pictorial kit inserts, and videos have been developed in multiple languages for each home kit, where modalities and importance of data capture are explicitly explained to the user.

(f) Currently, there are 3236 COVID-19 testing laboratories approved by ICMR for molecular diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2. Various testing modalities like RTPCR kits, TrueNat, CBNAAT, CRISPR, RTLAMP, Rapid RTPCR and rapid antigen tests are now available. ICMR has evaluated more than 1600 diagnostic commodities for COVID-19 (including RTPCR kits, VTM, RNA extraction kits, antibody assays, home tests and rapid antigen tests) and 755 have been approved for use.
