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सचिव

RAJESH BHUSHAN, IAS
SECRETARY



भारत सरकार
स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण विभाग
स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण मंत्रालय

Government of India
Department of Health and Family Welfare
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

DO No. Z.28015/185/2021-DMCell
27th November, 2021

Dear Chief Secretary,

Please refer to this Ministry's letter dated 25th November regarding the mutation of SARS-CoV-2 variant (B.1.1.529; named Omicron), reported from South Africa on 24th November 2021. WHO has designated this variant as a new Variant of Concern (VoC).

2. As a proactive step, Government has already placed countries where this VoC has been found in the category of 'At-Risk' countries for additional follow up measures of international travelers coming into India from these countries.

3. In view of the possible threat that this VoC can pose to the nation, it is imperative that the intensive containment, active surveillance, increased coverage of vaccination and Covid Appropriate Behaviour must be enforced in the field in a very proactive manner to effectively manage this VoC.

Rigorous surveillance of International Passengers

4. It is essential that the disease surveillance network in the country is geared up for rigorous follow up of all international travelers from all countries especially countries **designated as "At Risk"**. There is already a reporting mechanism for obtaining past travel details of passengers coming through international flights this should be reviewed at your level and the protocol provided by this Ministry should be strictly ensured including testing on disembarkation of international travelers coming from "At Risk" Countries and sending all positive samples for genome sequencing to INSACOG Labs in a prompt manner.

Enhanced Testing

5. Ample testing infrastructure need to be operationalized to tackle any surge due to this mutated virus. It has been observed that the overall testing as well as the proportion of RT-PCR tests have declined in some States. In the absence of sufficient testing, it is extremely difficult to determine the true level of infection spread. States must strengthen the testing infrastructure and strictly implement the testing guidelines.

Monitoring of Hotspots

6. Continued monitoring of "Hotspots" (areas where recent cluster of positive cases have emerged). In all such "hotspots", saturation testing and sending of positive samples quickly for genome sequencing to designated INSACOG Labs must be ensured in collaboration with Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Govt. of India and National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). States should keep a close check on the emerging trend of cases and the positivity in an area and quickly delineate hotspots for effective containment

of Covid-19. States should aim at achieving positivity rate below 5% while focusing on increasing the number of tests and share of RT-PCR tests to aid in early identification.

Ensuring augmentation of Health Infrastructure

7. Having adequate availability of health facilities across the state is essential to ensure that there are no delays in providing care. Trained human resources, infrastructure, logistics and procurement should be planned & strengthened considering the geographical spread of the pandemic and there shall be no compromise in providing prompt quality treatment to the patients. States are requested to optimally utilize the financial support provided by Govt. of India under ECRP-I&II diligently.

Ensuring prompt dispatch of samples for Genome Sequencing

8. INSACOG has been established to monitor the circulating variants in the country. It is important at this juncture that States must significantly increase sampling from the general population/community for genome sequencing by sending these samples to INSACOG Lab network as per the policy.

Regular Press Briefings by State for promoting Covid Appropriate Behavior & Vaccination

9. We have seen in the last surges in the country that discourse on COVID is often influenced by misinformation leading to anxiety in the masses. To address this, all States should proactively & regularly address the concerns of community through press briefings & State bulletins providing evidence based information. States may also ensure that community is well informed regarding the measures undertaken and advised to follow measures like Covid Appropriate Behaviour & getting vaccinated.

10. It is critical for the State/UTs to adhere to the overarching 'Test-Track-Treat-Vaccinate and Covid Appropriate Behaviour' principle to ensure stringent implementation of containment measures as per MoHFW guidelines.

11. I am sure that under your continued leadership we will be able to maintain the momentum and build on the progress made so far to address the latest threat of the pandemic. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare assures of all requisite support to the States/UTs.

Yours sincerely,

(Rajesh Bhushan)

Chief Secretary / Administrator (Separate letters)
All States / UTs

✓ **Copy to :** Principal Secretary to Prime Minister, South Block, New Delhi
Cabinet Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi
Home Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, North Block, New Delhi
Secretary, Department of Health Research, Govt. of India, New Delhi
Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Govt. of India, New Delhi

(Rajesh Bhushan)