

Amid Omicron threat, health experts says India should be prepared for third wave

Updated: 04 Dec 2021, 06:57 PM IST

HYDERABAD : A top health expert, on Saturday, said that, though the world awaits more information on the new Covid variant Omicron, India should be prepared to fight a possible "third wave" which may be caused by the emerging variant keeping in mind its high transmissibility but possibly low fatality.

The Executive Director highlighted "Hybrid immunity" as "protection" against Omicron and said, "When we talk about hybrid in relation to the COVID it means we are talking about the immunity which has been acquired through the infection and immunity which has been acquired through the vaccination. When these two work together we call it a hybrid."

Executive Director, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bibinagar, Dr Vikas Bhatia, talking about the helpfulness of the Hybrid immunity in the possible wave, said, "It is very difficult to predict because, and even at this point of time when more than 30 countries have reported one or more cases, we are still waiting for some more information. So, in this phase, we should be preparing ourselves that a third wave may come but at the same time, it may be good news in case we find that this particular virus Omicron is not very fatal. So far no death has been reported from any part of the world."

Dr Bhatia said that if oxygen levels decline due to Omicron variant, then that would be a concern but he believes that due to the ongoing nationwide vaccination programme, it should not be a problem.

"It might be a mild disease. It is possibly being observed in some countries such as South Africa that the gap between the infection and the manifestation of the disease is a little longer. And when it is longer than the Delta virus, it is likely to be transmitting and infecting more and more people. Now in case, the transmission rate is high, but its killing power is low, then it can transmit and generate immunity among the people," he added.

"Decline in the oxygen levels and the case fatality rates, they are our main concern. If those concern us more, we should not be bothering too much about the transmission of the disease. Because the vaccination programme is also going on," he said.

Dr Bhatia explained further, "When these two work together we call it a hybrid. So, hybrid immunity is there because a large number of people have already been exposed to COVID. So, they have because of the disease which occurred to them, or which manifested or for some reason they were admitted or which we saw the results as a seroprevalence was positive who got this infection. They may have immunity against the COVID plus the vaccination which has also been going on since January. So, together it becomes hybrid immunity."

The doctor said hybrid immunity in India is very high which has "better protection" against Omicron.

"The different surveys which have been done, this sero surveillance, they have given information that more than 70- 80 per cent of the population has already been exposed to the COVID infection, which means they have the antibodies in them. Simultaneously, we know that nearly 126 crore people until yesterday have also been vaccinated either with one dose or with two doses. So, it means that the

Making Corporate India Comply

hybrid immunity in India is very high. And the scientific evidence which has come forward is that people with the hybrid immunity have better protection against Omicron and COVID," he said.

Talking about the threat posed to children by the new variant, Dr Bhatia said that the mortality rates in them will be negligible due to the good immunity and other factors and suggested to start the vaccination of the adolescent age group between 12 and 18 years.

"We observed in the beginning that the maximum number of deaths were taking place in the elderly patients because of comorbidities and because of the low immunity with age. So that was the focus area, you know. The vaccination started from that age group 60 plus then 45 onwards, and then the age group was increased from 18 years onwards. Because of the good immunity and other factors, the mortality rates will be very low or in fact very negligible among the children," he said.

"Government of India is already in principle discussing these areas and there is a strong possibility that the government may start the vaccination of the children particularly in the adolescent age group between the 12 years and 18 years. So, some of the work is going on. We are just waiting for the policy decision by the government but it should be considered for the children as well," he added.

The central government on Saturday wrote to five states - Odisha, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Mizoram-- and Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and expressed concern over a rapid increase in daily Covid cases and mortality rate and also underlined the danger posed by the Omicron variant. Meanwhile, India reported a third Omicron case in Gujarat after 2 two cases reported in Karnataka.