

# Centre asks states to treat omicron infected patients in designated Covid facilities

Updated: 08 Dec 2021, 07:52 PM IST

**NEW DELHI:** In a bid to limit the spread of highly mutant new coronavirus variant omicron, central government on Wednesday asked states to treat patients infected with it in designated Covid facilities with separate isolation area.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan in a letter written to states and union territories (UTs) said that the states should ensure that no cross infection takes place and adequate precautions are taken by healthcare workers in these facilities to prevent transmission among other patients and healthcare workers. The health secretary asked states to regularly review and ensure that samples of positive cases of international travellers and their contacts as well as from emerging hot spots are promptly submitted to INSACOG labs for genome sequencing according to protocol.

Further to contain spread, it is imperative that states and UTs follow a mission mode and focused approach of quickly tracking primary and secondary contacts of positive cases and facilitate testing for them, he said adding that it is critical to track all contacts of such cases, quarantine them without delay and test them according to guidelines.

"Community surveillance should be prioritised to follow up positive case as well as contacts on a daily basis to monitor their clinical status and to keep a check on symptoms," said Bhushan.

"International travellers, who have arrived in the community, also need to be monitored by district surveillance teams and their testing on eighth day needs to be ensured if they have come from 'at-risk' countries," he said in the letter.

States and UTs should also undertake increased surveillance for detecting unusual events such as new clusters of Covid positive cases, vaccination breakthrough cases and reinfection cases, besides prompt investigation of such events by their rapid response teams, it further said. They should send all positive samples from these events to designated genome sequencing labs of INSACOG for whole genome sequencing, the letter said.

"All Omicron positive cases have to be treated in designated Covid facilities with separate isolation area earmarked for Omicron positive patients. It has to be ensured that no cross infection takes place and adequate precautions are taken by healthcare workers in these facilities to prevent transmission among other patients and healthcare workers," Union health secretary said in the letter.

Bhushan also suggested states and UTs to utilise the "eSanjeevani" telemedicine platform and call centers, and plan home visits by special teams formed for the purpose to contact those under home isolation or quarantine. "It is also important to highlight that in the absence of sufficient number of testing, it is very difficult to determine the true level of infection spread. States are requested to provision and maintain adequate testing in districts, particularly those districts with more than five per cent weekly positivity," Bhushan said.

Further, with the onset of winter and increased pollution in some states, prevalence of influenza like illness, severe acute respiratory infection and respiratory distress symptoms should also be closely

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monitored, he said adding that States must also focus on effective community awareness and follow up adherence of Covid appropriate behaviour.