

Centre reviews Public Health Response to COVID-19 in the light of emergence of OMICRON and Progress of Vaccination with States and UT

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- **States advised to enhance testing, surveillance and prompt dispatch of samples to INSACOG labs for genome Sequencing**
- **Optimal Utilization of ECRP-II to strengthen critical Hospital Infrastructure**
- **Operationalization of PSA plants, Oxygen Concentrators & Ventilators stressed**
- **Adequate Buffer Stock of Critical Drugs to be maintained across States**

The five-fold strategy of Test-Track-Treat-Vaccinate-adherence to COVID Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) was highlighted as the mainstay of public health response strategy for effective and timely control and management of COVID19 and its variants by Union Health Secretary Shri Rajesh Bhushan as he reviewed the public health preparedness to the Omicron variant of COVID-19 and progress of vaccination with Health Secretaries and NHM MDs of States and UTs, through video conference (VC) today. Dr Balram Bhargava, DG (ICMR) and Secy (DHR) as well as Dr Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary, DBT were also present.

States and UTs were urged to enhance testing and focus on surveillance to ensure early identification of the suspected cases for their prompt isolation and further clinical management. They were advised to ensure availability of PT-PCR testing in all districts. Districts reporting higher case positivity were alerted to monitor the case trajectory on a regular basis, and to promptly dispatch positive samples to the mapped INSACOG (Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium) labs for whole genome sequencing. Close monitoring of new emerging hotspots/clusters, breakthrough and re-infection cases, and prompt investigation of such events by the Rapid Response Teams was discussed. It was re-emphasised that all contacts for positive patients are to be traced and tested as per protocol as quickly as possible.

Based on the information of international travelers from 'at risk' countries from Air Suvidha portal, district-wise monitoring of international passengers who have tested negative on arrival with focus on symptomatic cases, was highlighted. In view of the forthcoming winter season, they were advised that prevalence of influenza-like illness (ILI) / severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) and respiratory distress symptoms needs to be closely monitored. Review of monitoring mechanism for effective home isolation was stressed.

In order to ensure that all hospital infrastructure is ready for any possible surge in cases, States/UTs were advised to review their readiness for providing quality medical care. They need to ensure that funds released by Government of India under ECRP-II are being utilised for creating and strengthening health infrastructure, and 100% matching funds are promptly released by States to the State Health Societies. As the progress of the funds utilisation at the field level is being reviewed by the Health Ministry, information on progress of funds utilisation needs to be filled in the portal created for the purpose. It needs to be ensured that all health facilities at the field level have functional ventilators, PSA plants, oxygen concentrators etc. States were informed that many ventilators supplied by the

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Centre are still lying unpacked and unused at some field hospitals, with consumables not being procured & made available by the States. This needs to be reviewed immediately to ensure that all PSA Oxygen plants, Oxygen concentrators and ventilators are installed and functioning.

The Health Secretary also urged the States to ensure to maintain adequate buffer stock for the eight critical drugs identified in clinical treatment of COVID-19; the Guidelines for these were shared with States in July 2021.

Underscoring the critical importance of vaccination drive, States were advised to continue increasing the pace and coverage of COVID19 nationwide vaccination drive with focus on the ongoing 'Har GharDastak' campaign for ensuring full vaccination of all eligible population, with regular monitoring at the village and district levels. In order to keep rumours at bay and address issues of vaccine hesitancy, States/UTs suggested to organise evidence-informed awareness campaigns with regular media briefings.