

Omicron-hit to be in separate isolation; Covid test for travellers on 8th day- Centre issues new SoPs. Details here

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With over 2 dozen of Omicron COVID-19 cases reported in India, Union health ministry directed states to follow certain guidelines including treating patients infected with the new variant in designated Covid facilities with separate isolation area.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan on Wednesday wrote to the states and UTs, "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."

Centre's guidelines for the states:

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, Bhushan advised the states.

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.

It is critical to track all contacts of such cases, quarantine them without delay and test them according to guidelines, Bhushan said.

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, he said in the letter.

"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," the letter said.

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 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," Bhushan said in the letter.

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, he said.

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"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 monitored, he said.

States must also focus on effective community awareness and follow up adherence of Covid appropriate behaviour, Bhushan said.