

# Centre tells states to pull socks up after dip in testing numbers

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A week after an advisory by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) detailing the list of people who need not be tested for Covid, such as asymptomatic individuals in community settings, the Centre has asked states to ramp up testing after noticing a dip in testing numbers.

In a letter Arti Ahuja, additional secretary, health ministry has said that it is incumbent upon all states to enhance testing and increase it in a strategic manner keeping in mind the trends in case positivity in specific geographies.

The Centre's advisory, Ahuja said, had to be read in conjunction with earlier guidelines that recommend focused testing of those who are at high risk, more vulnerable or live intensely populated areas with new clusters and hotspots of positive cases.

Both daily and weekly positivity rate for Covid-19 in India on Tuesday was over 14 per cent along with a decline in new cases which stood at 238,018.

Health ministry has clarified that the basic objective of the ICMR's advisory issued on January 10 and all its other advisories is early detection of cases for quick isolation and care.

Ahuja in her letter has said that testing remains a key strategy for the pandemic management because it helps in identification of new clusters of infection which can facilitate immediate containment, contact tracing, isolation and follow up.

Testing also helps in ensuring reduction in mortality and morbidity. "Progression of disease to a severe category can be averted by strategic testing...", Ahuja said.

In its January 10 advisory for purposive testing ICMR had said contacts of confirmed cases unless identified as high risk based on age or comorbidities need not be tested. The research body had also said that patients discharged through home isolation guidelines, individuals undertaking inter state domestic travel too can be exempted from testing.

In this context the health ministry has stressed that in a community setting all symptomatic individuals be tested along with risk contacts of laboratory confirmed cases.

According to a study by Local Circles, 41 per cent citizens surveyed said that they have one or more individuals in their close social network who despite having Covid symptoms in the last 30 days did not get an RT-PCR test and went into self-treatment or quarantine.

"The new ICMR guidelines do not require healthy contacts of COVID positive testing individuals to take the RT-PCR test.

Many people are now preferring to either take the home antigen test or skipping the testing altogether treating Covid like regular viral fever. Many leading scientists around the world are advising against this approach but it is being widely adopted in India now," the survey said.

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