

## Is Kerala going through third wave of Covid? Here what health minister has to say

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Confirming that Kerala is witnessing a third wave of coronavirus, Kerala Health Minister Veena George has cautioned people against the "super-spread" of the ongoing pandemic and said that both Delta and Omicron variants are contributing to the ongoing unprecedented surge in daily cases.

Contrary to the first and second waves of Covid-19, there is rapid spread of the disease in the third wave in the beginning itself, the Kerala Health Minister said at a press meet.

However, the Congress-led UDF opposition alleged that both the government and the health department were standstills when the third wave hit the state and the lack of preparedness and the scarcity of essential medicines aggravated the situation.

George said if the range of spread was 2.68 per cent during the second wave, it was 3.12 per cent these days and the next three weeks would be crucial for the state.

Though its severity is lesser, Omicron variant has the potential to spread the disease 5-6 times more than the Delta variant and so it should not be taken lightly.

Every single person should adhere to Covid protocol strictly to keep the pandemic under control, she told reporters here. George also warned of stringent action against those unleashing false propaganda regarding the pandemic and vaccination through social media platforms.

Stating that a section of people are spreading lies like Omicron is a "natural vaccine" and so it was not dangerous to contract the infection, she said such campaigns were baseless.

Whatever be the variant, the basic characteristics of the novel coronavirus were the same and people should take extra care to keep the disease at bay, the minister said.

"Delta (variant) was the reason for more cases during the second wave. The third wave happened before it was completely over. Now, both Delta and Omicron are contributing to the surge in COVID cases," George said.

Making it clear that the infectivity was very high these days, she said compared to the second wave, five percent more cases were expected during the third wave.

Stressing the need to follow health protocols without any fail in the present circumstance, the minister said vaccination was a defence against the infection, so everyone should take the jab at the earliest.

Officials should take special precaution to avoid cluster formations in their respective institutions. Urging people to avoid unnecessary hospital visits, she said aged people and those having co-morbidities should take more care.

She advised people to wear N-95 masks or double masks for better results. Rubbing news reports stating that there was scarcity of essential medicines in the state, she said the health department was

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fully prepared to tackle the situation and the slight rush witnessed by hospitals of late was natural. There are 3,107 ICU beds in government hospitals across the state while 7,468 are there in private sector health facilities. There are 2,293 ventilator beds in government hospitals and 2,432 in private hospitals, she added.

About 99.8 per cent of people, above the age of 18 years, were already given the first dose of vaccine and 83 per cent of them given the second dose. Besides this, vaccination among children stood at 57 per cent, she added.

The minister also urged the support of everyone, cutting across political lines and other differences, to deal with the situation and contain the disease effectively.

Meanwhile, Kerala on Wednesday reported 54 more Omicron, a variant of coronavirus, and took the total affected by the variant to 645, said the State Health Department.

Of the 54, two belong to outside States and have come to Kerala from various countries. "Out of those infected today, 33 were from low-risk nations and six from high-risk countries. Five people reached the State from other States; and 10 contracted the disease through their contacts," the department said in a press release.

Of these, 12 people are from Ernakulam district, 10 from Kozhikode, seven from Malappuram, six from Thrissur, five from Kottayam, three each from Thiruvananthapuram and Palakkad and two each from Kollam and Alappuzha districts, said the Health Department.

Out of the total 645 patients so far, 434 reached from low-risk countries while 107 came from high-risk nations. A total of 80 people in the State contracted the disease through their contacts while 24 people came from other states.

With agency inputs