

Dr. Harsh Vardhan briefs the media on Novel Coronavirus (COVID 19)

“Political commitment at the highest levels leading the government’s response”

Commends States for their hard work

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“Political commitment at the highest levels of the Government, led by the Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is leading the government’s response against Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID2019). India is prepared through its various timely measures and sturdy systems of surveillance for Novel Coronavirus”. This was stated by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare as he addressed a press conference on the status update, actions taken and preparedness on Novel Coronavirus disease in India, here today.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan stated that a high level Group of Ministers consisting of Minister of External Affairs, Minister of Civil Aviation, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Minister of State for Shipping and Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare has been constituted under his Chairmanship to monitor the situation. He added that regular reviews are held with all related Ministries of Health, Defence, External Affairs, Civil Aviation, Home, Textiles, Pharmaceuticals, Commerce, Panchayati Raj and other officials including State Chief Secretaries. “We have good and effective co-ordination among ministries, robust surveillance system, network of laboratories to support diagnosis, upgraded medical facilities, trained health work force and media presence that can reach even remote areas. We have put all these resources at our disposal to prevent / contain outbreak of novel coronavirus in India”, he stated. In addition to the ministerial meetings, a video conference is being held every other day with the states to review their preparedness and actions.

Dr Harsh Vardhan stated that all Ministries and States have done commendable work, in particular Kerala, which has put up a sturdy system of surveillance.

Elaborating measures taken by the Government of India, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said that Advisories/ Guidelines have been issued to the States on surveillance, sample collection, packaging and transportation, infection prevention and control, and clinical management. In fact, India was possibly the first country to issue a travel advisory on 17th Jan, 2020 itself. All these guidance documents are available on the website of MoHFW. The travel advisory is being updated as per the evolving situation.

He also informed that surveillance at Points of Entry (PoE) is continuing at 21 Airports, 12 major

ports, 65 minor ports and at 6 land crossings. So far at the airports a cumulative of 2, 51, 447 persons (2315 flights) have been screened, 3 suspected cases and 161 contacts have been identified. 5491 and 285 passengers and crew has been screened at major and minor ports respectively. Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) is carrying out community wide surveillance of passengers travelling from China, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea and Japan. Total of 15991 persons are being followed up for a period of 28 days of which 3058 have completed 28 days of observation period. 497 suspect cases have been isolated. ICMR is providing the Laboratory support with NIV, Pune as the nodal laboratory and 14 other network laboratories. This can be expanded to include 50 laboratories, if the situation so demands. So far 1071 samples have been tested, out of which 1068 were found negative and only 3 have tested positive in Kerala. In addition, clinical samples of the 654 evacuees at Manesar and ITBP camps have also been tested and all of them were found to be negative. All the 3 positive cases from Kerala are the students from Wuhan, Hubei, China. The observation was started from 28th January, 2020 and they were reported positive on 3rd February, 2020 by NIV, Pune. States have been asked to ensure adequate provisions for isolation facilities and critical care especially for ventilator support.

He also stated that the Rapid Response Teams have been trained by this Ministry in all States for managing emergencies due to high risk pathogens. Risk is being communicated through media including social media to raise awareness among the public. Daily press briefings are held and press releases issued. There is outreach to every village in the districts adjoining Nepal border through Gram Sabhas. Daily situational reports are generated. A 24x7 Control room cum Call Centre is operational.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan also informed that India evacuated 645 Indian persons from Wuhan city including 7 Maldivians, and quarantined them in 2 special quarantine camps and likely to be discharged once all of them test negative after a period of stay of 14 days. India has extended support to Maldives in testing samples and Bhutan in managing COVID-19. India has agreed to Support Afghanistan in testing samples. India is also extending help to China by sending essential items for combating COVID2019 in China as per commitment of Hon. Prime Minister.

Dr Harsh Vardhan further added that the surveillance at point of entries and in the community is the key to detect cases early, track the contacts and follow them up. He reiterated that the COVID19 is highly infectious; however, the redeeming feature is that the case fatality is about 2% in mainland China and less than 0.2% outside China. Many of the epidemiological parameters of this disease are not known.

In the end, he thanked the media persons for their responsible reporting, hard work and sincere efforts to ensure the containment of COVID19 in India, by spreading awareness among the people and handholding with the stakeholders to share the correct information and to avoid rumours.

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