

Dr. Harsh Vardhan engages with North Eastern States to review preparedness and containment measures taken for COVID-19 management

“Let’s focus and work together by converting the orange zones to green zones and maintain the protective status across the States”: Dr. Harsh Vardhan

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Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare held a high level meeting today with Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim to review the status of COVID-19 in the north-eastern States along with the measures being taken for its containment and management, in the presence of Sh. Ashwini Kumar Choubey, MoS (HFW), here today. The review meeting (over video conferencing) was attended by Dr. R Lalthangliana, Health Minister of Mizoram, Sh. Alo Libang, Health Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, and Shri Piyush Hazarika, MoS, Health and Family Welfare, Assam along with senior officers from the eight States.

At the outset, Dr. Harsh Vardhan appreciated the dedication of all the States in combating COVID-19 in the country. “It is a huge relief and very encouraging to see green zones in most North Eastern States. As of date, only Assam and Tripura have active COVID-19 cases; the other States are all in the green zone. Let us focus and work together by converting the orange zones to green zones and maintain the protective status across the States”, he stated. Dr Harsh Vardhan stated that as on 9th May 2020, a total of 59,662 cases have been reported from the country in which 17,847 persons have been cured and 1,981 deaths had occurred. In the last 24 hours, 3,320 new confirmed cases have been added and 1307 patients were found cured. He added that the fatality rate is 3.3% and recovery rate is 29.9%. He also added that (as of yesterday) there are 2.41% present active COVID-19 patients in ICU, 0.38% on ventilators and 1.88% on oxygen support. Dr. Harsh Vardhan also said, “The testing capacity has increased in the country and it is 95,000 tests per day with 332 Government laboratories and 121 private laboratories. Cumulatively, 15,25,631 tests have been done so far for COVID-19.”

During the detailed interaction with the NE States, they highlighted various issues related to testing facilities, health infrastructure, surveillance, contact tracing etc., and also shared their best practices. Dr Harsh Vardhan mentioned about the various measures taken by the Centre to combat COVID-19 so far. “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 (COVID-19). India is prepared and fighting with the pandemic through its various timely measures and sturdy systems of surveillance for Novel Coronavirus”. Dr. Harsh Vardhan said.

The Union Health Minister informed that appropriate measures are being taken to combat COVID-19 and with the cohesive efforts of both Centre and States, adequately growing numbers of dedicated COVID hospitals, Isolation & ICU beds and Quarantine centres being identified and developed. These provide us the assurance that the country is well-prepared to face any eventuality

due to COVID-19. Centre is also supporting by providing sufficient number of masks & Personal Protective Equipments, Ventilators etc. to the States/ UTs / Central Institutions, he further added.

To maintain the positive status of COVID-19 management in the North East, Dr. Harsh Vardhan advised the States to ensure that the returning migrant labourers, students and those returning from abroad should be screened and quarantined as per the guidelines and protocol laid down by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of External Affairs. He also stated that the guidelines for discharging patients is also revised and needs to be followed by all the States.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan stated, "While some states have worked in this direction, others need to focus on more effective surveillance, contact tracing, house to house survey and early diagnosis". He said, "Surveillance for Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI)/ Influenza Like Illness (ILI) should be intensified in unaffected districts and districts which have not reported cases from last 14 days and more through the IDSP network in collaboration with Medical College Hospitals", he added. He urged States to aggressively pursue the download of Aarogya Setu app to aid contact tracing and surveillance, and for self assessment by people. He advised the States to put the information of the earmarked facilities for COVID-19 like the dedicated COVID hospitals, COVID Health Centres and Care Centers in public domain to help people access the services. The States were informed that funds have been allocated by Minister of DONER (Ministry of DoNER) for strengthening of the health infrastructure, and states need to submit their proposals for availing of funds under this fund.

For the States that have international borders, Dr Harsh Vardhan stated that these States need to take adequate measures at the border areas to prevent exposure by conducting screening of all individual entering the State at entry points and following quarantine protocol as per the guidelines.

The States were reminded that in addition to the COVID-19 care, non-COVID-19 health services were equally important and should not be neglected. Due attention was required to be paid to health care services such as ANCs for pregnant women, immunization drives, OPD/IPD services, screening of NCDs and TB diagnosis and treatment. Adequate measures for prevention of vector borne diseases also need to be taken, they were advised. Also, facilities of telemedicine and tele-counselling could be used for reaching to a larger population for their healthcare needs. States were also advised to ensure that payments, salaries and incentives were paid to the healthcare staff, paramedics and other healthcare workers, for which States were also advised to ensure that the NHM funds were transferred to the Health Department. States were also informed that helpline number 104 in addition to 1075 can be used for grievance redressal for non-COVID essential services, and for providing the needed information to the people on their location etc. States were also advised to keep adequate stock of essential medicines and explore home delivery by engaging volunteers for the purpose.

In view of the larger prevalence of non-smoking tobacco usage in some of the states, Dr Harsh Vardhan advised the States to ensure that concrete actions were taken for prohibiting their wide usage and for prohibiting spitting in public places which shall help in preventing spread of COVID-19. Strong reforms are needed in this direction, he stated. He appreciated the effort of States that have banned the use of chewing tobacco and imposition of fine for spitting in public places.

Ms. Preeti Sudan, Secretary (HFW), Shri Rajesh Bhushan, OSD (HFW), Ms. Vandana Gurnani, AS & MD (NHM), Dr. Manohar Agnani, Joint Secretary (MoHFW), Dr. S.K. Singh, Director, NCDC along with Principal Secretary (Health) and other senior state health officials participated in the meeting.

MV/SG

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