

## Dr. Harsh Vardhan reviews status and preparations for COVID-19 management with Lt. Governor & Health Minister of Delhi

### “Delhi needs to ramp up testing with aggressive surveillance, contact tracing and stringent containment activities”

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“As the number of cases and fatality rises in Delhi, it needs to ramp up testing coupled with aggressive surveillance, contact tracing and stringent containment and perimeter control activities”. This was stated by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare as he chaired a high-level meeting through video conferencing (VC) to review the preparedness for prevention and control of COVID-19, here today. He was joined by Shri Ashwini Kumar Choubey, MoS (HFW), Shri Anil Baijal, Lieutenant Governor of Delhi and Sh. Satyendra Jain, Health Minister of Delhi.

As all districts of UT of Delhi are now affected by COVID-19, Dr Harsh Vardhan pointed out that “the rising cases, high positivity rates and low testing levels in many districts are worrisome”. While the average testing/million population in Delhi was 2018, some districts such as north east (517 tests/million population) and South east (506 tests/million population) were far below. While the UT’s positivity rate of last week was 25.7%, several districts reported figures above 38%, he said. The high rate of infection in the health care workers was also serious issue, he added. It indicates poor infection prevention control practices in health care settings and needs to be attended to on priority, he pointed out.

He underscored the immediate need and importance of scaling up of testing with health infrastructure enhancements along with better clinical management of the COVID-19 cases for effective case management and reduction of fatality rate. He also pointed that bed availability was to be rapidly increased in view of current rapid rise of cases along with avoiding unnecessary delay in admission of cases. “As a significant proportion are on home isolation, all efforts for timely response in terms of testing, triaging and shifting of patients to the required level of Dedicated COVID facility is important to avoid mortality”, he stated. The elderly and vulnerable population, such as those with underlying co-morbidities, need to be identified and protected, he said, adding that provisioning of institutional quarantine to vulnerable populations in large clusters where home isolation is not deemed effective, needs attention too.

It was pointed out that to undertake the needed steps in adherence with the protocols and guidelines issued by the Centre from time to time for reduction in the case fatality rate and improved containment measures in Delhi. It was advised that early detection of cases needs to be done by enhanced surveillance of ILI/ SARI cases. Fever Clinics and Flu corners in all Health care settings needs to be established in all corners of Delhi along with focus on contact tracing and surveillance. Use of Aarogya Setu app data for contact tracing was to be promoted. Risk communication and IEC Activities need to be enhanced as per target audience especially to avoid stigmatization of patients and their family members. Also non-COVID essential health care services need to be resumed.

All support is being extended to Delhi for the strengthening of health infrastructure and augmentation of testing facilities, Dr Harsh Vardhan stated during the VC. After detailed discussion with the DMs, Commissioners and Mayors of Delhi, he said that while some issues such as the density of population in many

containment zones did pose a serious challenge to the collective efforts of the administration, it was important to pool in resources and experiences for a convergent action, he advised. “This is a collective battle, and we are here to support Delhi in its efforts”, he stated.

The DMs and officials of Municipal Corporations briefed on the steps being taken in their area to contain COVID-19. They discussed issues related to perimeter control in containment zones, timely identification and classification of cases as stigma associated with COVID-19 stopped people from reporting symptoms or cases. They also highlighted that people seem to be getting complacent with following the norms regarding physical distancing during the Unlock 1.0 period. This was a major factor contributing to the new surge in cases, they stated.

While appreciating the efforts of the frontline workers, administration and other COVID warriors, Dr. Harsh Vardhan advised that now more than ever, was the need for following norms and protocols related to physical distancing, hand and respiratory hygiene, maintaining sanitation in our surroundings, respect for the doctors and other frontline health workers, not listening to and spreading rumours, helping to spread the authentic and correct information to help others, to be kind and supportive to the needy, elderly and vulnerable population. “I am confident that with our collective efforts, we shall be able to succeed in this war against COVID-19”, he stated.

Ms Preeti Sudan, Union Health Secretary, Shri Rajesh Bhushan, OSD (MoHFW), Ms. Arti Ahuja, Additional secretary (Health), Dr S K Singh, Director (NCDC), DMs of all districts of Delhi, Commissioners of three Municipal Corporations of Delhi and representatives of NDMC and other officials of the Government of Delhi participated in the review meeting.

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