

Dr Harsh Vardhan chairs 20th meeting of Group of Ministers (GOM) on COVID-19

India has one of the lowest global COVID fatality rates: Dr Harsh Vardhan

Dr. Vinod Paul, Member (Health) NitiAayog apprises GoM on Vaccine Development in India

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Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare chaired the 20th meeting of the high-level Group of Ministers (GoM) on COVID-19, here today. He was joined by Dr S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, Sh. Hardeep S. Puri, Minister of Civil Aviation, Sh. MansukhLalMandaviya, Minister of State, Shipping (Independent Charge), Chemicals and Fertilizers, Sh. Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Minister of State, Health & Family Welfare and Sh. NityanandRai, Minister of State, Home Affairs. Dr. Vinod Paul, Member (Health) NitiAayog, joined virtually.

At the outset, Dr. Harsh Vardhan expressed satisfaction at the various coordinated efforts of the Centre Government and those of the States/UTs. He stated “In the month since the last meeting of GoM on 31st July, we have made tremendous strides in containing the disease. As many as 26.4 lakh have already recovered. The country’s Case Fatality Rate is at its lowest 1.81% and consecutively Recovery Rate has increased to 76.47%.” He further informed the GOM that with creation of sufficient health facilities, the health infrastructure in the country has been amply strengthened. Also, only 0.29% of cases are on ventilators, 1.93% on ICU and only 2.88% of cases are on oxygen. A total of 1576 labs at present have led to an upsurge in testing and the goal of 10 lakhs tests per day has been fulfilled. More than 9 lakh samples were tested in the last 24 hours and this has led to the cumulative total number of tests crossing the 4 crore mark” he added. Dr Harsh Vardhan also informed the GOM that more than 338 lakhs of N-95 masks, nearly 135 lakh of PPEs and about 27,000 ventilators have been provided by the centre to the States/UTs.

The Union Health Minister instructed the Health Ministry to develop SOPs for the Members of Parliament and the Legislative Assembly sessions comprising COVID protocols and preventive measures. The GOM also expressed concern about the forthcoming festival seasons and advised everyone to adopt safe and COVID appropriate behaviour.

The GoM was briefed on the current status of COVID-19 in India. The global comparison clearly depicted that India has one of the lowest cases per million (2424) and deaths per million (44) compared to the global average of 3161 and 107.2 respectively. It was noted that despite being resource constrained and densely populated, timely lockdown and rapid augmentation of infrastructure by India have enabled to keep the case/million and deaths/million considerably lower compared to other countries. Within the country, eight States (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha and Telangana) contribute to around 73% of the active caseload, as of today. Moreover, seven States (Maharashtra, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) account for 81% of total deaths.

The GoM was briefed on the guidance note issued on the bi-directional TB and COVID screening, diabetes management in COVID facilities, etc., and the meeting chaired by Cabinet Secretary with the States where they were advised to ramp up testing and measures were suggested to contain the spread and reduce mortality below 1%.

Dr. Sujit Singh, Director (NCDC) presented a detailed report on surveillance efforts undertaken in India during the pandemic through the IDSP (Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme) network. He highlighted the challenges faced and the learnings from the various States. He also threw light on the trajectory of COVID in some States and elaborated on their response and management. The major concern areas in the country were highlighted. It was mentioned that there needs to be continued attention on promotion of wearing of masks, physical distancing and respiratory etiquettes. Behaviour change communication therefore assumes priority role in COVID management.

Dr. Vinod K Paul, Chairperson of the Empowered Group-1 on Medical Emergency management plan apprised the GoM of the process of COVID vaccine development in India and around the world. He stated that 29 candidates, including 2 Indian ones, are in Clinical Trials out of which 6 are in Phase III. In India, Bharat Biotech's vaccine candidate based on inactivated virus procured by ICMR is in Phase II trial along with ZydusCadila's candidate which is based on viral DNA. The Oxford vaccine candidate developed by Serum Institute of India is already in Phase III trial in Maharashtra and some other States. Dr. Paul also informed the GoM of the progress made by the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19. The group is tasked with facilitation of vaccine development including issues of trial and stockpiling, sorting out issues of financing, risk-management, selection of potential beneficiaries and their order of reference, envisioning logistics, scale up, digital system, defining principles for selecting beneficiary categories, and defining scientific basis for selecting vaccine. Three meetings of the Expert Group have been held so far.

Sh. Rajesh Bhushan, Health Secretary apprised the GOM on the efforts made by the Health Ministry towards mental health during the pandemic. He also stated that the Central Government was in direct communication with the States that were reporting a surge in cases and those with higher mortality rates. These were being guided towards measures that would result in saving lives and speedy recoveries.

Sh. Ravi Kapoor, Secretary (Textiles), Sh. Amitabh Kant, CEO, NitiAayog, Dr. Balram Bhargava, DG (ICMR), Sh. Amit Yadav, DG, Foreign Trade (DGFT), Sh. Anil Malik, Addl. Secretary (Home Affairs), Shri Dammu Ravi, Addl Secy (MEA), and other senior government officials including representatives of ITBP HQ participated through virtual media.

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