

## Vaccine hesitancy must go: Health Secretary

Important to increase testing significantly in 8 states including Maharashtra, proportion of RT-PCR tests must go up: Health Secretary

Strengthen COVID healthcare facilities once again without delay: Health Secretary

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Seven out of the top 10 districts with active COVID-19 cases are in Maharashtra (Pune, Mumbai, Nagpur, Thane, Nashik, Aurangabad, Nanded). While the average positivity rate of the country is 5.65%, Maharashtra's COVID19 positivity rate is 23%. Bengaluru, Urban Delhi and Ahmedabad are the other three districts with maximum number of active cases. Union Health and Family Welfare Secretary Shri Rajesh Bhushan presented the details at a media briefing on the actions taken, preparedness and updates on COVID-19, held at National Media Centre in New Delhi today.

Speaking about the trend of COVID cases reported in the country, Shri Bhushan said that "COVID-19 cases had started increasing from July, 2020, and reached the maximum point at during mid-September 2020, after which it started declining rapidly till mid-February, 2021. While there used to be an average 3000 cases/day during the second week of February 2021, it has gone up to around 34,000 new cases this week."

The Secretary expressed concern over the number of testing done across states. "It is important to increase testing significantly in Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat and Delhi and also increase the share of RT-PCR tests in these states," he stated.

Speaking about the actions taken in this regard, he said that "47 districts in Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, MP, TN, Karnataka, Gujarat and Delhi, represented by the District Collectors, were engaged in a comprehensive dialogue with the Health Ministry. We appealed to them to increase testing with focus on RT-PCR tests."

Shri Bhushan also appealed to monitor people in home isolation and in case of failing to do so, institutionally quarantine them and also trace close contacts of positive patients within the first 72 hrs. He said there is a need to strengthen private and public COVID healthcare facilities again and increase number of healthcare workers. He also requested all private facilities to be optimally utilized for COVID vaccination.

He spoke about intensifying vaccination in districts witnessing sudden surge in cases. "In the districts where there is a surge is being observed, there should be saturation coverage of age-specific priority groups for vaccination," he emphasized.

He appealed to all citizens aged more than 45 years to register for vaccination on CoWin Portal <https://cowin.gov.in/home> and get vaccinated from 1st April onwards

"No State, district and no part of the country should be complacent; The trend shows virus is very active," Member (Health), NITI Agog, Dr. V K Paul expressed his concern about the current surge of cases in the country. "The case fatality rate of the country has always been low. However from 77 deaths per day, it has gone up to 271 deaths per day, which is four times increase," he mentioned. He also appealed to the citizens to strictly follow COVID Appropriate Behaviour. "Mask is the social vaccine and it can be 70% effective", he added.

While answering a media query, DG, ICMR said that, "The efficacy of both Covaxin and Covishield is effective against UK variant and Brazilian variant. The work against South African variant is ongoing and its results are awaited."

In a reply to another media query Health Secretary stated that, "There are no Indian strains; this has been repeatedly informed. It is natural for a virus to undergo changes and it is inevitable; particularly for a virus which has travelled over 1 crore people. It is not a cause for panic."

Replying to another query on door-to-door vaccination in Maharashtra, Health Secretary said, "Centre has not received any request from the state of Maharashtra for door-to-door vaccination; The most important thing now is to target saturation vaccination in districts seeing large number of priority age group population. Vaccine hesitancy must go."

**[PPT presented by the Health Secretary can be accessed here](#)**

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