



INDIAN COUNCIL OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

Department of Health Research – Ministry of Health & Family
Welfare Government of India

Media report on “Briefing on COVID19”

Dr L K Sharma
Scientist E & Media Coordinator

Preface

The Communication Unit, ICMR since last one and half years have reached from (where is ICMR located) to (everyday mention of ICMR and DG ICMR in National Media). This change from where to why signifies the media visibility and importance of our organization within this stipulated time duration.

Every week Indian Council of Medical Research and Director General ICMR are mentioned by dozens of daily news papers, periodicals and magazines including online editions.

This report regarding “Briefing on COVID19” features the media/news coverage provided to the project by major national news papers of the country such as Hindustan Times, The Times of India, The Indian Express, The Hindu among others.

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Coronavirus: India Begins Lab-testing Influenza and Pneumonia Samples to Check Community Transmission

March 13, 2020/News18

Govt to start sentinel testing to check if virus has spread

March 13, 2020/The New Indian Express

India becomes fifth country to isolate Covid-19 virus strain

March 13, 2020/Live Mint

Suspected of COVID-19? You can get yourself tested at 65 government labs

March 13, 2020/Live Mint

'Next 30 days key in fight against Covid-19'

March 13, 2020/The Hindu Business Line

COVID-19: All you need to know about risk assessment, guidelines for testing and more

March 13, 2020/The Week

Coronavirus: India becomes 5th country to isolate virus strain

March 13, 2020/Millennium Post

India fifth country to isolate Coronavirus at NIV Pune lab

March 13, 2020/Zee News

India to start weekly tests for coronavirus in people without travel history from March 15

March 13, 2020/CNBC TV18

India 5th Country in the World to Isolate the Coronavirus: ICMR

March 13, 2020/The Quint

Fewer cases, but India becomes 5th country to isolate coronavirus

March 14, 2020/The Times of India

[उपलब्धि / पुणे के वैज्ञानिकों ने अलग किया कोरोनावायरस स्ट्रेन, ऐसा करने वाला 5वां देश बना भारत; दवा बनाने में मदद मिलेगी](#)

March 14, 2020/Dainik Bhaskar



[Coronavirus: India has 30 days to halt onset of stage III, says ICMR DG](#)

March 14, 2020/The Times of India

[Wuhan-like coronavirus strain isolated in India: ICMR](#)

March 14, 2020/The Hindu

[ICMR to test for community transmission of Covid-19](#)

March 14, 2020/The Indian Express

[Community transmission of Covid-19 is inevitable: ICMR](#)

March 14, 2020/The Economics Times

[ICMR develops testing strategy for COVID-19 patients](#)

March 15, 2020/ANI News

[Is India running too few coronavirus tests?](#)

March 15, 2020/The Hindu Business Line

[Fast-tracked and extensive testing key to coronavirus containment](#)

March 15, 2020/Hindustan Times

[Coronavirus | Number of confirmed cases in India crosses 110](#)

March 15, 2020/The Hindu

[Coronavirus: HIV medications can be utilized in extreme cases, says ICMR](#)

March 15, 2020/Microbioz India

[Explained: Coronavirus testing in India, elsewhere](#)

March 16, 2020/The Indian Express

[India manages isolating coronavirus strains at ICMR-NIV](#)

March 16, 2020/Hindustan Times

[ICMR intensifies random testing to check for covid-19](#)

March 16, 2020/The Economics Times

Coronavirus: India Begins Lab-testing Influenza and Pneumonia Samples to Check Community Transmission

March 13, 2020/News18

Having reported local transmission among families and acquaintances, India has reached stage two of the coronavirus outbreak, government scientists have said. Now, the government has begun testing random samples of influenza-like illnesses and pneumonia-like illnesses of those without travel history to check if community transmission of coronavirus has taken place. Community transmission means that the source of the original transmission among a set of people in a particular community is hard to find whereas the source is known during a local transmission. Between February 15 and February 29, the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** tested 150 samples of influenza-like illness and severe acute respiratory illness to ensure coronavirus has not infected those without a history of travelling abroad. So far, none of the samples have tested positive for Covid-19. Under the current testing protocols released by ICMR, only those with history of travel to high-risk countries affected by Covid-19 and those who came in contact with persons testing positive were asked to be quarantined for 14 days. Among them, only those who are showing symptoms of Covid-19 infection are being tested. As of now, 51 laboratories across 27 states are tasked with testing for coronavirus samples. These viral research and diagnostic laboratories also get samples of patients who develop influenza-like illness or those displaying severe pneumonia symptoms. “It is important to keep an eye to ensure we are not missing out on community transmission. The samples we tested in February were evenly distributed. We did it in 13 places because in February, our testing capacity was only functional at 13 labs in the country,” said Dr Nivedita Gupta, scientist, Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases Division.

Govt to start sentinel testing to check if virus has spread

March 13, 2020/The New Indian Express

Worried at the soaring cases, the Centre, for the first time, is set to carry out sentinel testing to check if community transmission of the virus has already taken place. Sources in the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) said sentinel testing will be carried out through the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme’s influenza surveillance, which will randomly test swabs from patients hospitalised across India with severe acute respiratory syndrome and influenza. For the initiative, about 20 labs across India are set to be activated. For coronavirus, the government so far had only been carrying out ‘need-based testing’ which means testing suspected cases with a travel history from countries with outbreak and their contacts who showed symptoms of infection. The latest initiative is in line with the approach adopted by many countries battling the outbreak. “We are in the process of finalising the protocol to see whether there is any community transmission of the virus even as the containment efforts are on,” said a senior official with the National Institute of Epidemiology under ICMR spearheading the project. Community transmission is defined as transmission of pathogen when there’s no direct link between an infected person and source of infection.

[India becomes fifth country to isolate Covid-19 virus strain](#)

March 13, 2020/Live Mint



Moving a step ahead towards finding a vaccine for Covid-19, India has become the fifth country to successfully isolate the virus strain after Japan, Thailand, United States of America and China. The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**, the apex health research body of India, said that isolation of the virus is the first step towards expediting the development of drugs, vaccines and rapid diagnostic kits in the country. Scientists at the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune have isolated 11 strains of the Covid-19. Still, they will need between 18 months and two years to develop a Covid-19 vaccine even if the clinical trials are expedited, the government said. "Coronavirus was very difficult to isolate but the scientists at NIV Pune have been successful in getting around 11 strains isolated. The strains are the prerequisite for conducting any research related to viruses," said Raman R. Gangakhedkar, head of the epidemiology and communicable diseases division of the Indian Council of Medical Research. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is no vaccine to cure Covid-19. China has used HIV drugs on some Covid-19 patients but that has to be studied for efficacy. "We have not used any anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs on the seven patients that have recovered. We have only used routine medicines to treat those patients," ICMR scientist Raman R. Gangakhedkar.

[Suspected of COVID-19? You can get yourself tested at 65 government labs](#)

March 13, 2020/Live Mint

With cases of COVID-19 swelling to 84 in India along with two casualties due to the virus on Friday, the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** expanded its network of Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDLs) equipped to test COVID-19 from 51 to 65. ICMR is also the testing agency for the virus. The secondary test for reconfirmation of the virus which was earlier conducted only in National Institute of Virology (NIV) has also been expanded to 31 laboratories, the ICMR said on Friday. In New Delhi, there are currently three laboratories testing for COVID-19 which are based at the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (not under VRDL network), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi and Lady Hardinge Medical College and hospital. The testing laboratories have recently also been approved in Srinagar, Chandigarh, Jodhpur, Patna, Agartala, Dibrugarh, Bhopal, Jabalpur, Pondicherry, Jamnagar, Varanasi, Amritsar and Agartala. "We have a total network of over 106 laboratories across the country. As the requirement is increasing with the evolving situation of COVID-19, we are identifying more laboratories from this network. In case of any signs or symptoms like fever, dry cough, difficulty in breathing etc. one should visit a doctor or call the Ministry of health and family welfare's 24X7 Helpline - 011-23978046. They should always remember to wear a mask before stepping out to see the doctor," said senior official at the ICMR. "If the person is very sick, the doctors and paramedical staff can also come to his/her home as well and collect the sample. They can also go to a designated government hospital for giving sample," the official said.

'Next 30 days key in fight against Covid-19'

March 13, 2020/The Hindu Business Line



Socially distancing oneself from large crowds for the next 30 days may prove handy in battling Covid-19. So far, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has confirmed 81 Covid-19 cases in the country. Ten persons have been cured so far while one has died. **Indian Council of Medical Research** Head and Secretary of the Department of Health Research Balram Bhargava said India is at Stage Two of the pandemic wherein local transmission has occurred among persons who came into contact with those infected and had a travel history. “Next is Stage Three when the virus spreads unfettered in the community, and then comes Stage Four, as in the case of Italy or China, when there are mass lock-downs. If India manages to contain the virus at Stage Two within the next 30 days, then, the progress to Stage Three could be slower or we may not witness it at all,” said Bhargava. To understand if Covid-19 is spreading in the community, ICMR is testing throat swabs of limited populations in which patients report flu-like illnesses or chest infections for SARS-COV2 — the virus that has caused the pandemic.

Testing samples

“While 13 regional labs of ICMR were testing 20 samples each of this nature between February 15 and 29, we will expand our footprint to 51 labs which will now conduct these tests on a weekly basis. Till date, all the tests carried out as a part of the surveillance have been negative,” said Nivedita Gupta, Scientist, Epidemiology and Communicable diseases at ICMR.

COVID-19: All you need to know about risk assessment, guidelines for testing and more

March 13, 2020/The Week

On Friday, a 69-year-old woman, who tested positive for coronavirus infection, passed away in Delhi, becoming the second person to die due to COVID-19. The Union health ministry had said the situation in India so far is "not a health emergency" even as the number of people infected with the disease touched 85.

What is the risk assessment for COVID-19 in India?

There are several stages for the disease. Stage one is that the disease is “imported”— only seen in those who have travelled abroad recently. Stage two is that of local transmission, which means that the traveller has passed on the infection to close contacts/ household members. Stage three is that of community transmission where the infection has been acquired by those who don’t have travel history or don’t know anyone who has.

Currently, we are stage two and the next month is crucial to ensure that we don’t have community transmission, according to Dr Balram Bhargava, DG, **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**, who explained the rationale behind the decision of Delhi (and other state governments) to shut down schools, colleges and advising avoiding large gatherings.

What are the guidelines for testing?

As of now, the government is testing only those who are symptomatic and have a history of travel to COVID-19-affected countries, or have come in contact with a person who has tested positive for the disease. According to Dr Bhargava, the criteria will be revised as per the evolving situation. India has had no cases of community transmission.

[Coronavirus: India becomes 5th country to isolate virus strain](#)

March 13, 2020/Millennium Post



Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the apex health research body in the country, has successfully isolated the COVID-19 virus strain, making India the fifth nation in the world to do so. Other countries that have isolated the virus are Japan, Thailand, US and China. The isolation is the first step towards expediting the development of drugs, vaccines and rapid diagnostic kits in the country. ICMR has been closely working with the health ministry and other departments to tackle COVID-19. ICMR, which is also the testing agency for the virus, has expanded its network of labs equipped to test COVID-19 to 65 from 51. The secondary test for reconfirmation of the virus, which was earlier conducted only in National Institute of Virology, have also been expanded to 31 labs. These steps will enable India to expedite detection of the virus. Till date, ICMR has tested more than 6,500 samples of 5,900 individuals, out of which 78 cases have tested positive for the virus. ICMR is equipped to handle more volumes of samples if the need arises. Professor Balram Bhargava, secretary, Department of Health Research & Director General, ICMR, said "People should not panic, but take precautionary measures. Strong systems and processes are in place to deal with COVID-19 and the ministry is constantly monitoring the situation." "We at ICMR have been constantly in a vigil mode and our laboratories have enough capacity to test. We will be issuing advisories and revising guidelines for testing as and when necessary," he said.

[India fifth country to isolate Coronavirus at NIV Pune lab](#)

March 13, 2020/Zee News

Pune's National Institute of Virology (NIV) has succeeded in isolating the deadly coronavirus from an affected patient. According to reports, it has a 99.98% match with the virus in China's Wuhan. This significant medical breakthrough will help India in developing a vaccine for the deadly Coronavirus. China, the US, Thailand and Japan have earlier isolated the virus. However, a Health Ministry official was quoted by PTI as saying that it will take around one-and-a-half to two years for India to develop a vaccine for novel coronavirus even with expedited clinical trials and approvals. The novel coronavirus has affected 128,392 people in 117 countries and claimed the lives of at least 4,728 as of now. Till now, there are 81 confirmed cases in India, out of which 64 are Indians, 16 Italians and 1 Canadian national.

Sharing more details, Raman R Gangakhedkar, head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases-I (ECD-I), Division of **ICMR**, said that the NIV has been successful in isolating the virus. "There are two ways of going for vaccine preparation. One is either you look at the sequences of the gene which then may lead to the development of antibodies, or you actually have the strain and then you try to develop a vaccine which is always an easier option," he said.

"Coronavirus is difficult to isolate. But the efforts of scientists of National Institute of Virology (NIV) Pune have been successful and about 11 isolates of coronavirus are available which is a prime requisite for doing any kind of research related to viruses. Even with expedited clinical trials and approvals, it will take not less than around one-and-a-half to two years to develop a vaccine," Gangakhedkar said. In a related development, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday urged people to avoid non-essential travel and large gatherings to break the chain of the spread of coronavirus and said his government is fully vigilant about the situation.

[India to start weekly tests for coronavirus in people without travel history from March 15](#)



March 13, 2020/CNBC TV18

ICMR, the apex medical research body of India, will collect samples from 51 labs across the country every week and these samples will be from people who show signs of influenza-like illness, severe respiratory issues and have not travelled to any foreign country recently. **ICMR** has already been conducted these tests from mid-February but the frequency will increase to once a week from once in 15 days earlier. The move is aimed at checking and preventing community transmission of the novel coronavirus or COVID-19 in the country. As of now, India is in Stage 2 where there are cases of local transmission or where only those people are suspects who have either travelled to a foreign destination or who are in close proximity with someone suffering from coronavirus. As of 5:00 PM of March 13, India had a total of 81 positive cases of COVID-19, of which 10 have recovered and rest are stable.

[India 5th Country in the World to Isolate the Coronavirus: ICMR](#)

March 13, 2020/The Quint

ICMR has said that India is only the 5th country in the world to isolate the coronavirus. It's a big step for the country as you need positive cases of the virus to be able to do this. Isolating the virus is the first step to vaccine development.

In a press briefing on March 13th, Friday, Indian Council of Medical Research said isolating the virus requires a positive patient. With few cases, it was a tough job, said Dr Balram Bhargava, adding that even with less number of samples, ICMR scientists have managed to achieve this. A total of 20 isolates are ready with them and they are 99.9% similar to the Wuhan virus. FIT spoke to Dr Nivedita Gupta, head of the control room at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) who took us through the common symptoms of the virus: Speaking about India preparedness, ICMR also spoke about expanding India's testing capacities. Currently 65 labs are acting as primary testing facilities. They have another 30 to 40 collection labs.

Explaining the COVID-19 death, the experts spoke about how the patient moved from one hospital to another. They said they'll revise testing protocols week on week depending upon developments. Expanding on the stages of the disease, ICMR said that currently India is at stage two, where local transmission occurs. Next step is community transmission followed by an epidemic. It is at the epidemic stage that Italy and China shut down cities. Stressing on the importance of self quarantine and social isolation, they said it will take 30 days of restrictions to avoid community transmission. Dr Gupta added that a vaccine is the goal but the result may take up to 3 years to pass the appropriate clinical trials.

Fewer cases, but India becomes 5th country to isolate coronavirus

March 14, 2020/The Times of India



India has become the fifth country to successfully isolate a strain of the novel coronavirus. China, Japan, Thailand and the US did it before. Simply put, it means that scientists have been able to obtain a pure sample of the virus that has been contained outside the human body. The scientific success is important because it will help in developing drugs, vaccines and rapid diagnostic test kits, the director general of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Dr Balram Bhargava, said. He added that the isolation of the novel coronavirus, the agent responsible for the ongoing outbreak of Covid-19, wasn't easy as India had fewer positive cases when they started the project. "Total 21 throat swab and nasal swab samples were examined for this purpose. Of that, 11 tested positive and eight strains could be isolated from among them. They are 99.98% identical with the strain of the virus that led to outbreaks in Wuhan in China," said Dr R R Gangakhedkar, chief epidemiologist at ICMR. He added that now scientists can test whether a drug will work against the virus or not to develop rapid diagnostic kits.

उपलब्धि / पुणे के वैज्ञानिकों ने अलग किया कोरोनावायरस स्ट्रेन, ऐसा करने वाला 5वां देश बना भारत; दवा बनाने में मदद मिलेगी

March 14, 2020/Dainik Bhaskar

दुनिया के 145 देशों में फैल चुके कोरोनावायरस के स्ट्रेन्स (अलग-अलग रूप) को अलग करने में भारतीय वैज्ञानिकों को सफलता मिली है। **इंडियन काउंसिल ऑफ मेडिकल रिसर्च (आईसीएमआर)** ने बताया कि पुणे स्थित नेशनल इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ विरोलॉजी (एनआईवी) के वैज्ञानिकों को यह सफलता मिली है। वायरस के स्ट्रेन्स को अलग करने से इसकी जांच के लिए किट बनाने, दवा का पता लगाने और टीके का शोध करने में काफी मदद मिल सकेगी। अभी तक अमेरिका, जापान, थाईलैंड और चीन ही दुनिया में चार ऐसे देश हैं, जिन्हें ये कामयाबी मिली है।

'भारत ने पहला चरण पार कर लिया है'

आईसीएमआर पुणे की वैज्ञानिक प्रिया अब्राहम ने बताया कि कोरोनावायरस से बचाव के लिए भारत ने पहला चरण पार कर लिया है। जयपुर में संक्रमित मिले इटली के नागरिकों और आगरा के छह मरीजों में वायरस की जांच करने के बाद स्ट्रेन को आइसोलेट किया गया। साथ ही, उस स्ट्रेन का वुहान में मिलने वाले स्ट्रेन से मिलान किया गया। इनके बीच 99.98% की समानता मिली है। उन्होंने बताया कि किसी भी महामारी को रोकने के लिए उसके वायरस की पहचान होना जरूरी होता है। ये एक प्रकार से पहला चरण होता है जिसके बाद टीके और उपचार आदि को लेकर काम किया जाता है।

जल्द रोक देंगे कोरोना का वायरस: आईसीएमआर

एक अंग्रेजी अखबार से बातचीत में आईसीएमआर के महानिदेशक डॉ. बलराम भार्गव ने इसे वैज्ञानिकों की बड़ी कामयाबी बताया है। उन्होंने कहा वायरस को अलग करने वाला भारत दुनिया का पांचवां देश है। अब कोरोना वायरस का टीका खोजने की दिशा में वैज्ञानिक आगे बढ़ सकेंगे। उन्होंने ये भी बताया कि इस वक्त लोगों के सहयोग की जरूरत है। अगर सब कुछ नियंत्रण में रहा तो जल्द हम कोरोना को यहीं पर रोक देंगे।

Coronavirus: India has 30 days to halt onset of stage III, says ICMR DG

March 14, 2020/The Times of India



India is in stage II of the Covid-19 outbreak - where disease transmission is limited to those with travel history to the affected countries and others in contact with the infected persons - and government's efforts are geared towards halting or at least delaying the progression to the next stage, **Indian Council of Medical Research** director-general Balram Bhargava said. The progression to the next stage may eventually happen but by delaying it India is making itself better prepared to localise and contain the situation, Dr Bhargava said. "India has around a 30-day window to halt the beginning of community transmission of Covid-19 cases. The time to act is now," he said. In stage III, the virus starts spreading through the community. This is followed by stage IV, when the disease takes the shape of an epidemic, when the ongoing transmission has no clear endpoint. China and Italy are in stage VI of the Covid-19 outbreak. Bhargava said the government is taking all possible containment measures to halt, or at least delay, the progression of the outbreak to stage III. Dr R R Gangakhedkar, the chief epidemiologist at ICMR, said only those with symptoms of Covid-19 were being tested as present. "Everyone with flu symptoms doesn't need to get tested because the spread of the disease is limited at present. Even among those with travel history or possible contact with an infected individual, testing is advised only if he or she has symptoms of Covid-19. This is because if the test is conducted in asymptomatic individual the viral load is likely to be less and that may result in false negative results. Such individual may get a false sense of security and continue to spread the disease," he said. ICMR scientists said the advisory on testing may be changed if there is enough evidence of Covid-19 reaching stage III.

Wuhan-like coronavirus strain isolated in India: ICMR

March 14, 2020/The Hindu

India is only the fifth country in the world besides — Japan, Thailand, U.S. and China — to have successfully isolated the COVID-19 virus strain, helping it take the first step towards expediting the development of drugs, vaccines and rapid diagnostic kits in the country. Confirming this, Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Balram Bhargava said on Friday that this was a huge step forward for India. "The strain that we have is 99.99% similar to the Wuhan strain. You also have to understand that India has managed to isolate the strain from a very small batch of positive cases which is a remarkable achievement," Professor Bhargava said. The Council, on Friday, also announced that it has expanded its network of labs equipped to test COVID-19 from 51 to 65 and that the secondary test for reconfirmation of the virus which was earlier conducted only in National Institute of Virology have also been expanded to 31 labs.

Labs underutilized

"These steps will enable India to expedite detection of the virus and will help in effective management. Till date ICMR has tested more than 6,500 samples of 5,900 individuals, of which 81 cases have been tested positive for the virus. "ICMR is equipped to handle more volumes of samples if the need arises. As of now our labs are being underutilised," he said. Speaking about virus transmission in India Professor Bhargava said the need of the hour is not to panic but take precautionary measures. "Strong systems and processes are in place to deal with COVID-19 and the [Health] Ministry is constantly monitoring the situation.

[ICMR to test for community transmission of Covid-19](#)

March 14, 2020/The Indian Express



To rule out community transmission of Covid-19, over a thousand samples of influenza- or pneumonia-like illnesses, taken from patients without any travel history or contact with infected persons, would now also be tested for coronavirus every week. Community transmission is when people begin to catch a disease from those who do not know they have the infection. A network of 65 laboratories of the Department of Health Research and the Indian Council of Medical Research (DHR-ICMR) will now test 20 samples each week — 10 of influenza-like illnesses and 10 of severe acute respiratory infection — for Covid-19. Senior ICMR scientist Nivedita Gupta on Friday said the exercise was being done to document if community transmission was happening in any region of the country. “We don’t want to do indiscriminate testing, but it is also important that we are not missing on community transmission... If we find a positive case anywhere then the strategies would be completely different,” she said. India has also become the fifth country to isolate the virus after China, Japan, the US and Thailand, ICMR’s director general Dr Balram Bhargava said, adding that the strain of virus isolated is “99.99 per cent similar” to that in Wuhan. With the virus now isolated, authorities can begin working on a vaccine for it. Bhargava said, “We have the virus available with us, and that can help us develop more rapid diagnostic kits and could pave the way for vaccine development in future, which is still far away and every country is working towards that.”

[Community transmission of Covid-19 is inevitable: ICMR](#)

March 14, 2020/The Economics Times

Community transmission of Covid-19 is inevitable, experts at India’s top health research body have said. Having isolated the virus which is a 'Wuhan-like strain', they believe the virus would follow the same pattern as it did in China. “The virus will behave the same way it has behaved in China. It will follow the same pattern,” **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** director general Balram Bhargava said. India has a 30-day window to halt the beginning of community transmission, he said. “If we manage 30 days, if community transmission doesn’t happen in the next 30 days, we may be at a good wicket.” Community transmission happens when a patient who is not exposed to anyone known to be infected and has not travelled to countries in which the virus is circulating tests positive for infection. Experts at the ICMR said there were four stages of the disease. Stage 1 is getting imported cases, stage 2 is local transmission, stage 3 is community transmission and stage 4 is when it turns into an epidemic. While, India is at stage 2 now, experts said stern precautions were being taken so that going to stage 3 could be halted. “Taking these precautions will help so we don’t go into stage 3 which has happened in all other countries including Italy, China, the US and Europe. Going to that stage is inevitable but if we can prevent, that window of opportunity is now,” added Bhargava. There is a possibility that if community transmission happens, it could be a localised transmission which can be immediately contained like it happened during Zika virus. “It is not essential that the entire country will be swept of,” said Nivedita Gupta, a scientist at the ICMR.

ICMR develops testing strategy for COVID-19 patients

March 15, 2020/ANI News



The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has developed a coronavirus testing strategy for patients infected with the virus. The apex medical research institute has explained whom to test against the COVID-19 and how it should be done. The selection of patients is being made on the basis of their symptoms, travel history and direct contact with the infected person. "If a person comes in a direct close physical contact of laboratory-confirmed positive cases and has a history of travel in last 14 days to high-risk COVID-19 affected countries, they should be home quarantined for 14 days," ICMR stated. "During home quarantine, a person is observed whether he or she is symptomatic or asymptomatic within 14 days. If a person shows symptoms, then the patient's sample is sent to laboratory test or else one can contact to the union health ministry helpline for testing. If a person does not show any symptoms, no laboratory test is required. A person is asked to follow good standard hygiene," it said. The samples are then sent to AIIMS, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and National Institute of Virology (NIV) for testing. So far, the government has built up over 50 centres for testing samples. Speaking to ANI, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said, "By following basic hand hygiene and cleaning hands with soap or sanitisers, one can keep infection away. One should also avoid going to crowded places." So far, India has detected 84 positive confirmed cases of COVID-19 and it has killed two people.

Is India running too few coronavirus tests?

March 15, 2020/The Hindu Business Line

At ₹5,000 per head, only those with travel and contact histories are being tested now; testing protocol doesn't address community transmission. In the light of the limited testing protocol charted out by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the novel coronavirus (Covid-19), a Maharashtra-based physician faced a strange dilemma while treating a patient with severe multi-organ failure and pneumonia at the ICU of a rural hospital. SP Kalantri, Professor of Medicine at Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, in Wardha, said: "We are unable to figure out who the villain is — bacteria or viruses (in this case). The regional lab refused to test his sample for Covid-19 because he lacked a travel history." Kalantri wondered if the testing criteria for Covid-19 are too restrictive. Balram Bhargava, Head, **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**, and Secretary, Department of Health Research, is emphatic that only those who have a travel history, and those who have come in contact with them, and then have gone on to develop the symptoms of cough, cold, fever, breathlessness and so on will be tested for Covid-19. India has activated 67 laboratories for conducting the first test, and 51 of those are equipped to conduct confirmatory tests, which is not even one lab per district. India has 732 districts.

Fast-tracked and extensive testing key to coronavirus containment

March 15, 2020/Hindustan Times



Speedy and widespread testing will prove to be one of the make-or-buy measures in stopping the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) transmission from turning into an acute community transmission. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the country's apex health research body, has increased testing capacity from 51 to 65 not just for preliminary testing, but also for confirmatory testing. The improved strength will cut the lag time by 24-48 hours for test results. "The secondary test for reconfirmation of the virus, which was earlier conducted only at the National Institute of Virology [NIV] in Pune, have also been expanded to 31 laboratories. These steps will enable India to expedite detection of the virus and will help in effective management," said Dr Balram Bhargava, director general, ICMR. India's capacity of testing 100,000 samples for Covid-19 can be increased further by adding ICMR's network of 106 virus research and diagnostic laboratories (VRDLS) within days. ICMR is also negotiating with the private sector for rapid-testing kits that can cut the testing time from five-six hours to 15-20 minutes. "Given that the symptoms of Covid-19 and the common flu could be similar, effective screening and diagnostics is key to prevent undue anxiety and focus on providing care to those infected, and containing further spread of the infection in the vicinity of those infected," said Dr Shravan Subramanyam, managing director, India and Neighbouring Markets, Roche Diagnostics India Private Limited.

Coronavirus | Number of confirmed cases in India crosses 110

March 15, 2020/The Hindu

The Union Health Ministry on Sunday said there were 110 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country. However, reports from States put the figure of persons testing positive at 114. Of the new cases two were from Maharashtra, two from Kerala and one each from Rajasthan, Karnataka, Telangana and Uttarakhand. Ten persons have so far been discharged after treatment. Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan reviewed action taken by States and Union Territories and preparedness regarding prevention, containment and management along with senior officials. The government has maintained that no cases of community transmission — that is sick people testing positive for the virus who have no traceable link to travellers who've come into India from abroad — have been detected. However, a senior researcher at an institution affiliated to the Union Science Ministry, who did not wish to be identified, said "it is likely" that community transmission is ongoing in India but has not been recorded in official counts due to inadequate testing. A 45-year-old woman in Kalaburagi, who was in contact with the 76-year-old man who died of COVID-19 in the district last week, tested positive on Sunday. The toll of infected persons in Karnataka has now risen to seven, including the victim. A third case of COVID-19 was also confirmed in Telangana, with a 48-year-old man who returned from the Netherlands and was admitted to the Gandhi Hospital on March 11 testing positive.

Coronavirus: HIV medications can be utilized in extreme cases, says ICMR



March 15, 2020/Microbioz India

As per ICMR specialists, the consideration of the counter HIV drugs for treating Covid-19 depended on prior proof about their adequacy against SARS and MERS coronaviruses that prompted episodes in various pieces of the world in 2002-03 and 2012, individually, just as the docking examines led by National Institute of Virology, Pune. Anti-HIV medications, Lopinavir and Ritonavir, can be utilized to treat Covid-19 patients in extreme cases. India's top wellbeing research body, the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**, has recommended this in the treatment convention for Covid-19 distributed by it in IJMR, a clinical diary. Lopinavir and Ritonavir, the convention recommends, can be utilized in grown-ups more than 18 years old who are affirmed positive for Covid-19 and have intricacies, for example, extreme respiratory pain, low circulatory strain and new-beginning organ brokenness. It has fixed parameters to choose how extreme the respiratory pain ought to be for the fixed portion mix to be utilized on a patient. Comparable parameters have been fixed for other potential confusions also, whereupon the medication can be utilized to spare the patients. As per ICMR specialists, the consideration of the counter HIV drugs for treating Covid-19 depended on prior proof about their viability against SARS and MERS coronaviruses that prompted flare-ups in various pieces of the world in 2002-03 and 2012, separately, just as the docking examines led by National Institute of Virology, Pune. "Use of IFN-B1b (a drug used for treating multiple sclerosis) and Ribavarin (an antiviral medication used to treat certain respiratory infections, hepatitis C and some viral haemorrhagic fevers) was not considered due to their reported toxicity whereas Oseltamivir (used to treat swine flu) was not considered due to its unproven efficacy against CoVs (coronaviruses)," states the treatment protocol published in Indian Journal of Medical Research (IJMR).

Explained: Coronavirus testing in India, elsewhere

March 16, 2020/The Indian Express

On Friday, the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** announced that it would start testing influenza patients without any travel history or contact with novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) for signs of community transmission, terming it "inevitable". Last week itself, the Health Ministry had announced that India had recorded its first cases of community transmission, though officials later clarified it had meant "local transmission in the community". Various countries have adopted various models for addressing community transmission, or for preventing it. India's decision also raises the question: will the larger number of tests open up testing at private facilities? It is one of the levels of transmission defined by the World Health Organization (WHO). Simply put, community transmission means that a virus is circulating in the community and can affect people with no history of travel to affected areas or of contact with an infected person. That is what ICMR is trying to find out by testing over 1,000 samples from people suffering from influenza-like symptoms but with no history of such travel or contact. India's current emphasis on social distancing and discouragement of public gatherings, too, is aimed at checking community transmission.

[India manages isolating coronavirus strains at ICMR-NIV](#)

March 16, 2020/Hindustan Times



India's efforts to develop a vaccine against the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) have received a boost as the country's apex virology laboratory, the **Indian Council of Medical Research**-National Institute of Virology (ICMR-NIV) in Pune, has managed to isolate the strains of Sars-Cov-2, the virus that causes the infection. The virus strains have been isolated using the throat swabs of the initial three patients in Kerala — all students from Wuhan in China. The isolation of virus strains is the first step towards expediting the development of drugs, vaccines and rapid diagnostic kits in the country. Other countries such as Japan, Thailand, the United States of America and China have already isolated the virus strains. Countries isolate strains from their patients to check for variations in samples. ICMR has been working in close coordination with the ministry of health, and other departments in its efforts to tackle the new outbreak. "The viruses from the corona family are difficult to grow (culture); in that we have been lucky that we could culture all 11 (strains found in the three patients in Kerala) successfully. We are keeping the viruses artificially alive, growing them in cell lines," said Dr RR Gangakhedkar, head of epidemiology division at ICMR. "Isolating the virus will mean we could have our own vaccine in future. However, there are several research projects active globally right now that are working on war footing to develop a vaccine against Covid-19, but I would say it will take at least one-and-a-half to two-years before a vaccine sees the light of day," he said.

[ICMR intensifies random testing to check for covid-19](#)

March 16, 2020/The Economics Times

With Covid-19 cases increasing, India's apex medical body is intensifying the random sampling of people who display flu-like symptoms but don't have any history of travel to outbreak zones to determine whether community transmission is taking place. Each of the 51 **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** laboratories is to test 10 such samples every week. The exercise began on March 15. Before this, the ICMR had picked up 20 samples and tested them at 13 labs to check for community transmission between February 15 and 29. "Since the number of cases are more, we are more aggressive now," said Nivedita Gupta, scientist, epidemiology and communicable diseases, ICMR. "We thought that in order to rule out community transmission, let's keep on checking these samples also for the presence for Covid-19." This comes as reports from other countries suggest that the spread of Covid-19 by people who are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic may be responsible for more transmission than previously thought. ICMR experts aren't convinced about following South Korea's strategy, which has reported more recoveries from Covid-19 than new infections through aggressive testing without any lockdowns. Indian experts said they will revise the testing protocol depending on the situation. "The testing strategy will completely change if we find any positive case in these random samples that we plan to test," Gupta said. According to ICMR director general Balram Bhargava, "The testing protocol is a moving target...The testing strategy will be revised in a week's time if it's needed to and having looked at the circumstances." South Korea, where the outbreak is said to have stabilised, is mass testing nearly 20,000 people every day and has a fatality rate of 0.7%. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has said that asymptomatic transmission is a possibility.