

# WUHAN-LIKE CORONAVIRUS STRAIN ISOLATED IN INDIA: ICMR

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

A man wearing a facemask makes his way with other commuters along a road in Mumbai on March 13, 2020. | Photo Credit: [AFP](#)

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.

Coronavirus | Masks, sanitisers declared essential commodities

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.

Coronavirus spreads across globe; toll crosses 5,000

“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.

“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. We have to be prepared for community transmission stage but we would like to highlight the fact that if we all work together and follow the guidelines we can improve the outcome.”

India is currently in the second stage of transmission — local transmission — and scientists here are speaking about why they are not recommending asymptomatic testing for all noted that they are taking measures to detect the first signs of community transmission.

“We started 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. Between February 15-29, ICMR tested 150 samples. We will be carrying out this exercise again beginning March 15 with wider sample size,” said Dr. Nivedita Gupta, a scientist with the Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases Division of the ICMR.

ICMR added that they are not recommending asymptomatic testing because people may

become complacent and infect others.

“As per the the current testing protocols, which is reviewed and revised as per need, 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 infection are being tested,” added Dr. Gupta.

Speaking about the various stages of outbreak and recurrence of the flu, ICMR said there is no evidence to suggest that you cannot be infected again. “What we know is that there are three stages of the disease. Stage one is marked by imported cases and we have got that in India. In stage two, there is local transmission, which too we have demonstrated to have happened here in the case of Agra and Kerala. Then we have community transmission and then an outbreak,” explained Dr. Bhargava.

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