

## 'INSACOG SHARED INPUTS ON VARIANTS'

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

Selfie of the times: People waiting for their dose of vaccines, which have proven effective against variants of the novel coronavirus. R.V. Moorthy

The INSACOG consortium of scientists, spanning 10 labs across the country, and involved in sequencing genomes of coronavirus samples in different States, had been giving regular updates on the threat from new strains to the government, said a senior member of the group.

"The INSACOG members have meetings every alternate day. Whatever the results of analysis that emerge from the threat posed by new strains is shared with the National Centres for Disease Control and being a Health Ministry [body] is naturally shared with government," Rakesh Mishra, Adviser, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, told *The Hindu*.

Dr. Mishra retired as the Institute's Director in April and since has been a scientific advisor there. "This system has been in place for most of this year, since the INSACOG system has been put into place," he said.

INSACOG refers to the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genome Sequencing Consortia.

In an interview to the news portal *The Wire* on Tuesday, Dr. Mishra said that warnings of an increase in cases from the increasing prevalence of new variants were conveyed to the government channels that eventually could likely have made their way to the Prime Minister's Office.

At a press meeting on Wednesday, Health Ministry officials said that information on genome sequencing had been shared with States twice in February, 2021, four times in March 2021, and again four times in April.

### Stringent measures

In a video conference with States, the Union Health Ministry said it was informed about the current status of Variants of Concern and new mutants and "stressed on increased and stringent public health interventions".

The current surge in cases could be correlated with the rise in the B.1.617 lineage of SARS CoV-2, popularly known as the "Indian variant" of the coronavirus, the officials added.

Dr. Mishra, in response to the interviewer's questions in his interview to *The Wire*, agreed that India's political leadership should have been more communicative about the risks that events such as political rallies and religious gatherings posed, in the way of crowding, and transmission of newer infectious variants getting magnified.

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