

**Doubling time of cases before lockdown was around 3 days, it has gone up to 6.2 days during last 7 days:
Health Ministry**

**Multi-pronged efforts being made to develop vaccine
for COVID-19: Health Ministry**

**Going to conduct a study to find out the potential
effect of BCG vaccine in the fight against COVID-19:
ICMR**

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The number of COVID-19 positive cases stands at 13,387 as on date, while 1,749 people or 13.06% of total cases have recovered. In the last 24 hours, 1,007 new cases and 23 deaths have been reported. This was informed by the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Shri Luv Aggarwal, at the daily media briefing on the actions taken, preparedness and updates on COVID-19, held at National Media Centre, PIB New Delhi today. The Joint Secretary further informed that before lockdown, the doubling time of cases was around 3 days, while the doubling time for last 7 days has been 6.2 days. In 19 states and UTs, doubling time is higher than national average (or doubling rate is lower), he informed. Looking at the situation from another angle, the Joint Secretary informed that the average growth factor of number of cases has been 1.2 since April 1 till date, while the average growth factor was 2.1 during March 15 - March 31, 2020. This decline of 40% has occurred due to increase in testing, including testing of SARI and ILI cases, he said. Speaking of outcome ratio – the ratio of no. of recoveries vs. no. of deaths, India has been doing better than many other countries in this respect. We are taking efforts to further improve this ratio, Shri Aggarwal informed.

The Joint Secretary also stated:

- 5 lakh rapid antibody testing kits are being distributed to states and districts where high case burden has been observed.
- Group of Ministers held a meeting today to chalk out further direction with respect to [the](#) ongoing lockdown. The meeting reviewed efforts of S&T institutes in the areas of diagnosis, vaccines, drugs, hospital equipment accessories and general wellness. CSIR, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Science & Technology and Department of Atomic Energy are working on increasing testing capacity, for which these institutes have dedicated 30 labs. Our focus is on i) developing new, rapid and accurate diagnostic testing kits which can give result in 30 minutes, ii) innovative pooling strategies which can cover more people, iii) indigenous synthesis of critical components which can be domestically produced and iv) viral sequencing, to identify epidemiology and potentially important mutations.
- Forecasting tools have been shared with states and districts for better planning of infrastructure across

different COVID facilities based on the assessment of case load.

- A total of 1,919 COVID dedicated hospitals and COVID Health Centres have been identified, with a capacity of 1,73,746 isolation beds and 21,806 ICU beds.
- AIIMS has organized an online training course on mechanical ventilation management for physicians.

Speaking about the progress on vaccine development, the Joint Secretary informed:

- There is progress on vaccines development spanning inactivated virus, antibodies to major antigens, monoclonal, and RNA based vaccines. India is working with global partners to ensure that effective vaccines can be developed, and made available to all of us as soon as possible. It is a time-consuming effort but all our actions are focussed towards speeding up the process. Immune boosting vaccines such as Recombinant BCG (bacillus of Calmette and Guerin) and Mw (Mycobacterium Indicus) strain are in the works. Convalescent plasma therapy has also been initiated on some sites.
- DBT has undertaken large scale efforts as regards human monoclonal antibodies to COVID-19.
- Effective drugs play a very crucial role. Currently, we have many potential drugs, none of which are fully proven, and many are not made in India. In view of the uncertainties in which drugs will actually succeed, and to ensure that India will have access to successful drugs, a multipoint strategy has been created which also takes into consideration India's traditional knowledge in boosting the immune system. India is a participant in the SOLIDARITY trial of the World Health Organization, through which the effectiveness of these therapies is being determined.
- Scientific task forces are evaluating existing approved drugs and working on repurposing them for COVID-19.
- Anti-viral drugs have shown initial promise in foreign studies. CSIR has progressed into an indigenous synthesis of multiple promising anti-viral molecules such as Umifenovir, Favipiravir.
- Phytopharmaceuticals and leads from traditional medical systems are being explored in parallel along with Ministry of AYUSH.
- To complement the rapid pipeline for discovery efforts, expedited approval systems have been established between DBT and MoHFW

Briefing about medical equipment and ancillary devices, Shri Aggarwal informed:

- Production of ancillary support devices such as personal protective equipment, oxygen concentrators, ventilators, CSIR engineering labs is being augmented by indigenous designs of Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology under Department of Science & Technology.
- A manufacturing facility has been supported by the Department of Biotechnology at Andhra Medtech Zone.
- Indigenous manufacturing of RT PCR kits has started, we will be able to produce 10 lakh kits per month from May 2020.
- Manufacturing of Rapid Antibody detection kits will also start, with a capacity of 10 lakh kits per month by May 2020.
- Ventilator manufacturing capacity is 6,000 ventilators per month.

The Joint Secretary highlighted the example of Ahmedabad's Civil Hospital which, within 5 days, has been turned into a Dedicated COVID hospital with advanced facilities, 1,200 beds and 228 ventilators.

Be it diagnostics, therapeutics or vaccines, work is taking place on war footing, said the Joint Secretary. He reiterated that we need to continue to focus on containment strategies, social distancing, respiratory etiquettes, hand hygiene and environmental hygiene.

Informing that states and UTs are actively implementing lockdown measures and that special alertness is maintained on banks and markets, the representative of the Home Affairs Ministry stated:

- [MHA has issued an order to exempt certain activities regarding Minor Forest Produce, Plantations, NBFCs, Cooperative Credit Societies and Construction in Rural Areas from Lockdown Restrictions.](#)
- Situation regarding essential services is satisfactory. India Post has been playing an important role in ensuring the same. More than 100 tons of medicines and medical equipment have been delivered to hospitals and other institutions. Special steps have been taken to deliver domestic and international shipments. 2 lakh postmen and grameen dak sevaks are delivering Aadhaar-based benefits provided

through public sector banks and India Post Payments Banks at beneficiaries' houses. Post offices have taken steps to ensure door-step delivery of pension and other government benefits to citizens. The neighbourhood Post Office is providing its services to the society and trying to supplement the efforts of the state/local administration to reach out to the masses to fulfil their financial, health care and welfare needs in these challenging times of Covid-19. Aadhaar enabled Payment System has also been enabled at the post offices so that the people having bank account with any bank can withdraw up to Rs 10000/- per month from any Post office. In close coordination with state/local administration efforts are being made to dry ration and safety gears such as masks, sanitizers and soap to the public. Departmental mail motor vehicles have been placed at the disposal of district/municipal authorities to provide logistics support in distribution of food and other items, medicines etc.

A total of 3,19,400 COVID-19 tests have been done till yesterday, informed Dr. Gangakhedkar, the representative of ICMR. 28,340 tests were done yesterday, out of which 23,932 were done in 183 labs of ICMR network and remaining 4,408 tests were done in 80 private labs.

Replying to a query on use of pooled testing by private hospitals, the ICMR representative stated that the Council has recommended pooled testing for the purpose of surveillance, which can be used where positivity rate is low. It has not been recommended for individual diagnosis since this may work out to be costlier for individual patients; this is something which private hospitals may like to consider, he said.

Responding to a question on the discovery of mutations of the virus by an institute in Gujarat, Dr. Gangakhedkar said that while multiple strains have been found in the country, it will take some time for us to know the predominant quasi-species of the virus in the country. This should not however pose a threat to the effectiveness of vaccines which are being developed, since i) all sub-types of the virus take birth from the same enzymes and since ii) the virus has been found to not mutate very fast.

To a question on the efficacy of BCG vaccine, he said that ICMR is going to conduct a study in order to find out the potential effect of BCG vaccine in the fight against COVID-19. Till the results of the study are out and conclusive evidence is obtained, we will not recommend the vaccine even to health workers, he informed.

LIVE tweets by [@PIB_India](#) from the media briefing can be found on [this thread](#).

DJM/SC

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