

"Current vaccines are effective against Delta Variant as per the studies undertaken by ICMR on the issue"

Chennai, July 20, 2021: In a recent interview, Dr N K Arora, co-chair, Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) elaborates about the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for testing and follow-up on variants, what makes the Delta variant so transmissible, how genomic surveillance can help contain its spread, and reemphasises on the importance of COVID appropriate behaviour.

INSACOG is a consortium of 28 laboratories of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Dept. of Biotechnology, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) for whole genome sequencing in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. INSACOG was established by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India on 25/12/2020.

Recently INSACOG expanded its reach. What is the thought behind its expansion?

There is a need to keep a strict vigil on the emergence of variants of concern and outbreaks so that they can be contained before they spread to a larger region. The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG), established in December 2020, was a consortium of 10 laboratories. Recently 18 more laboratories became part of it.

The idea is to have a strong network of laboratories to do genomic surveillance of the SARS-CoV-2 and correlate whole genomics sequencing (WGS) data with clinical and epidemiological data to see whether or not a variant is more transmissible, causes more severe disease, escaping immunity or causing breakthrough infections, affecting vaccine efficacy, and diagnosed by current diagnostic tests.

Then National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) analyse this data. The entire country has been divided into geographical regions and each lab is given the responsibility of

one particular region. We have formed 180-190 clusters with around 4 districts in each cluster. Regular random swab samples and samples of patients who develop severe illness, vaccine breakthrough infections, and other atypical clinical presentations, are collected and sent to regional laboratories for sequencing. The current capacity of the country is to sequence over 50,000 samples per month; earlier it was approximately 30,000 samples.

What kind of mechanism country has for testing and follow up on variants?

India has a well-established mechanism of Integrated Disease Surveillance. The IDSP coordinates sample collection and transportation from the districts/sentinel sites to Regional Genome Sequencing Laboratories (RGSL). The RGSLs are responsible for genome sequencing and identification of Variants of Concern (VOC)/Variants of Interest (VOI), Potential Variants of Interest and other mutations. Information on VOC/VOI is directly submitted to the Central Surveillance Unit for clinical-epidemiological correlation in coordination with State Surveillance Officers. The samples are then sent to the designated bio banks.

RGSLs, upon identification of a genomic mutation which could be of public health relevance, submit the same to Scientific and Clinical Advisory Group (SCAG). SCAG thereafter discusses the Potential Variants of Interest and other mutations with experts and if necessary, recommends to the Central Surveillance Unit for further investigation.

Sharing of information and clinical-epidemiological correlation is done by IDSP, a unit of NCDC, along with the Ministry of Health, the Indian Council for Medical Research, Department of Biotechnology, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and state authorities.

Finally, the new mutations/variants of concern are cultured and scientific studies are undertaken to see the impact on infectiousness, virulence, vaccine efficacy and immune escape properties.

The Delta variant has been in focus as a global concern. What makes this variant so virulent?

B.1.617.2, a variant of COVID-19 is known as the Delta variant. It was first identified in October 2020 in India, and was primarily responsible for the second wave in the country, today accounting for over 80 percent of new Covid-19 cases. It emerged in Maharashtra and travelled northwards along the western states of the country before entering the central and the eastern states.

It has mutations in its spike protein, which helps it bind to the ACE2 receptors present on the surface of the cells more firmly, making it more transmissible and capable of evading the body's immunity. It is around 40-60 percent more transmissible than its predecessor (Alpha variant) and has already spread to more than 80 countries, including the UK, the USA, Singapore, and so on.

Does it also cause more severe disease as compared to other variants?

There are studies that show that there are some mutations in this variant that promote syncytium formation. Besides, on invading a human cell, it replicates faster. It leads to a strong inflammatory response in organs like the lungs. However it is difficult to say that disease due to delta variant is more severe. The age profile and the deaths during the second wave in India were quite similar to that seen during first wave.

Is Delta Plus variant more aggressive than Delta variant?

The Delta Plus variant—AY.1 and AY.2—has so far been detected in 55-60 cases across 11 states, including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and

Madhya Pradesh. AY.1 is also found in countries like Nepal, Portugal, Switzerland, Poland, Japan but AY.2 is less prevalent. The variant is still being studied for its transmissibility, virulence, and vaccines escape characteristics.

Are the vaccines effective against the Delta variant?

Yes, current vaccines are effective against Delta Variant as per the studies undertaken by ICMR on the issue.

Some parts of the country are still witnessing a spurt in the number of cases. Why?

Though there is a significant dip in the number of cases in most parts of the country, some regions are witnessing a high-Test Positivity Rate (TPR) particularly in the north-eastern parts of the country and several districts in the southern states, most of these cases could be due to the Delta variant.

Can future waves be prevented?

A virus begins infecting a part of the population, which is most susceptible and also exposed to the infection. It diminishes after it successfully infects a large proportion of the population and strikes back when the immunity developed in the people post-natural infection fades. The cases may go up if a new, more infectious variant comes. In other words, next wave will be driven by a virus variant to which significant proportion of population is susceptible.

The second wave is still going on. Any future waves will be controlled and delayed if more and more people get vaccinated and most importantly, people follow COVID-Appropriate Behaviour effectively, especially till a substantial part of our population gets vaccinated.

People need to focus on vaccination and adherence to COVID Appropriate Behaviour to manage COVID-19.

Till now 40 crore Indian have become 'Bahubali' by taking vaccination on their arms: PM



Chennai, July 20, 2021: Welcome friends and I hope all of you have been vaccinated at least once. But even then, I pray to all of you and my colleagues in the House to cooperate in following the Corona protocols. Vaccine is given in 'baahu' (arms), and those who take it become 'Baahubali'. The only way to become Baahubali to fight against corona is to get vaccinated.

Over 40 crore people have become 'Baahubali' in the fight against Corona. It is being taken forward rapidly. The pandemic has gripped the entire world, the entire human race. Therefore, we want meaningful debates in the Parliament over the pandemic. It should be given the highest priority so that we get all the practical suggestions from all the honorable MPs so that there can be a lot of innovation in the fight against the pandemic. If there are some shortcomings, then they can be rectified and we can move forward together in this fight.

I have also requested all the floor leaders to take time out in the evening tomorrow because I want to give them a detailed presentation on the

pandemic situation. We want the discussion in the House as well as outside with all the floor leaders, because I have been continuously meeting chief ministers. Discussions are taking place at different forums. It will be convenient if there is a discussion with the floor leaders along with the debate in the House.

Let this session be result oriented with effective debates so that the

Friends, the internal arrangement during this session is not like the last time, everyone is going to sit and work together because almost everyone has been vaccinated. Once again thank you all very much and urge you to take care of yourself. Let us all work together to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the country.

Thanks a lot, friends!

CLC reviews implementation of Labour Laws and new Labour Codes at Zojila Pass and Kargil

Chennai, July 20, 2021: Chief Labour Commissioner and DG Labour Bureau Shri DPS Negi reviewed the status of sensitization and implementation of labour laws and labour codes at Zojila Pass and Kargil today. In separate meetings with project officials from BRO and NHIDCL, Shri Negi enquired about the prevailing labour issues at their project

He took note of their problems, working in the far-flung area of the country, Shri Negi explained to them the benefits of GoI schemes, both for the workers in the organised as well as unorganised sector. Shri Negi explained to the officials and contractors about the importance of implementation of labour laws and new labour codes.



Shri Negi requested the workers to apply and get their labour cards made, as also to register themselves in the NDNU portal, which the Labour Ministry, Government of India is launching very soon. He made them aware about their rights, and assured them that the Government is always sensitive towards their welfare, safety and security. Shri Negi complimented the workers for serving the country in such harsh conditions, doing yeomen service for the Nation building. He said, the Government is committed for their welfare measures and is

also doing whatever is possible he also assured them that all officers and staff will leave no stone unturned for getting them their due rights and highly appreciated and told that their contribution to nation building will always be remembered.

The Chief Labour Commissioner explained to the officials and contractors about the importance of implementation of labour laws and new labour codes. He spoke at length about how compliance with new labour codes is a win-win situation for both the employees and the employers.

The EV REVOLUTION BEGINS WITH A BANG! OLA SCOOTER GETS 100,000 RESERVATIONS IN A DAY

Chennai, Jul 20, 2021: Ola today announced that its electric scooter received a record breaking 100,000 reservations within the first 24 hours, making it the most pre-booked scooter in the world.

Ola Electric opened the reservation for its electric scooter in the evening of July 15th. The revolutionary Ola Scooter can be reserved for ₹499 via olaelectric.com. The company is seeing unprecedented demand from customers who continue to throng the website to book the scooter in record numbers.

Bhavish Aggarwal, Chairman and Group CEO, Ola said "I am thrilled by the tremendous response from customers across India for our first electric vehicle. The unprecedented demand is a clear indicator of shifting consumer preferences to EVs. This is a huge step forward in our mission to transition the world to sustainable mobility.

I thank all the consumers who have booked the Ola Scooter and have joined the EV revolution. This is only the beginning!"

The Ola Scooter is a revolutionary product from Ola Electric, with class leading speed, unprecedented range, the biggest boot space as well as advanced technology that make it the best scooter customers can buy. It will be priced aggressively to make it widely accessible. Ola will reveal the features and price in the coming days.

The Ola Scooter will be made-in-India for the world, to be manufactured at the company's state-of-the-art Futurefactory, the world's largest, most advanced and greenest two-wheeler factory, being built in Tamil Nadu. The first phase of the Ola Futurefactory is nearing completion and will be operationalised soon, while



the full capacity of 10 million vehicles per annum will be built by next year.

Chennai, July 20, 2021: The Minority Affairs Minister Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi today inaugurated one of the six medical oxygen plants, installed by Radico Khaitan in various parts of Uttar Pradesh, at the Community Health Centre, Bilaspur in Rampur.



Speaking on the occasion Shri Naqvi said that efforts and appeal of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to tackle Corona pandemic have shown results as more than 1500 medical oxygen plants have been/are being installed across the country under "PM-CARES".

He said that these six medical oxygen plants, with a capacity of 20 cubic meter medical oxygen generation per hour, are being installed by Radico Khaitan in

various parts of Uttar Pradesh, at the Community Health Centres at Bilaspur (Rampur), Bilhaur (Kanpur), Bhagwantpur (Prayagraj), Mahoba (Mahoba), Manjhanpur (Kaushambi) and Manikpur (Chitrakut). He said, better facilities and resources by the administration and precaution and self-restraint by the society can make the country free from Corona pandemic.

Shri Naqvi stated that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's commitment to good health and well-being of the people has ensured that India

presently has an indigenous production capacity of over 5 lakh PPE kits are being manufactured in India every day; more than 4 lakh Ventilator are being produced