

Dr KK Aggarwal
5th September 1958 - 17th May 2021

HCFI Round Table Expert Zoom Meeting on "Are People Adopting COVID-appropriate Behavior During Unlocking and School Reopening"

26th June, 2021 (11 am-12 pm)

KEY POINTS OF HCFI EXPERT ROUND TABLE

- Many people still do not follow COVID-appropriate behavior. In view of the emerging Delta plus variant and the rapidly spreading Delta variant, there is definitely a possibility of a third wave, which may come in few weeks.
- Schools have been closed for almost 2 years now. This has affected education as not more than 50% students are able to join online classes.
- As the second wave is receding with unlocking going on, COVID-appropriate behavior is very important.
- Despite awareness at different levels, it is observed that there is poor compliance to COVID-appropriate behavior. Initially during the first wave, precautions like wearing mask/face shield, hand washing, physical distancing, avoiding crowds were being followed, but now they are not being adhered to strictly.
- Appropriate masking, social distancing and community behavior are all very relevant as regards COVID-appropriate behavior.
- We have to improve ourselves in totality; not just citizens but also those entrusted with the responsibility of implementation of COVID-appropriate behavior such as masking in public places and become responsible citizens.
- Wearing masks not only means protecting others from the infection, but also protects oneself.
- Each of the three layers of the mask has a different function to perform. The innermost layer absorbs the secretions of the wearer, the middle layer is the filter and the outer layer is splash resistant but allows air to penetrate. The fabric mask must also have three layers. Hence, standardization of masks is important.
- Double masking must be done. Communication about proper masks, including double masking, has to percolate down to the last mile.
- A distance of 3 feet at least is desirable to be on the safe side, but this may not be practically possible always.
- Responsible and willing citizens can be empowered and recruited into the system to make up for shortage of regulatory staff.

- When implementing regulations that are being mandated as law such as masking, it is also important to see if the people have enough resources to buy masks, can they maintain physical distancing of minimum 3 feet in their circumstances, have they been trained for regular hand washing and can afford to buy soaps?
- Affordability and accessibility must be ensured before implementing a law.
- If provisions are not made available to the consumer, there is bound to be disobedience.
- To increase the success rate of adherence to COVID-appropriate behavior, it is not the penalties that will help. They are only a last resort option.
- Counseling is not given enough importance in our society. We have to bring in an environment that is more all-encompassing and helping people to get reformed.
- IIT Mumbai alumni are making short videos of COVID-appropriate behavior in all languages to educate people and are offering them to all NGOs free of cost. While it is important to educate people, it is also important to enable them. So, information about how quality masks can be sourced should also be provided simultaneously.
- The procurement system should be made more transparent and accountable.
- General protocols to be followed by people for every sector should be defined and published by regulatory authorities.
- In Kerala, gazetted officers of various departments have been appointed as sector magistrates to monitor and enforce implementation of COVID containment measures. They have the power to charge a fine as penalty for violation of containment measures.
- Instead of self-declaring one's COVID status, people should be asked to fill in a questionnaire with questions such as their purpose of going out, high risk people in the family, etc. This will make the person aware that he and his family are at risk if he goes out.
- Vaccination should be made a criterion in offices, etc.
- Educational institutes should now be opened with precautions in place.
- All higher education institutions can be opened; teachers and students who have taken both doses of the vaccine can be allowed to come. Schools can be opened in shifts.
- Closure of schools has hampered many milestones of young children, including cognitive domain because of interaction with electronic devices at a very young age.
- Staggered schooling should be started. Children should be brought to schools in rotation. The concept of bio-bubble can be brought in schools also. Interaction is very important for children as otherwise it will affect their mental health and development.
- This is the time when we can contain the third peak; there have to be strict containment measures at all levels to prevent spread, there have to be strict fines.
- There are about 48 cases of the Delta plus variant in the country (at the time of meeting). There is an apprehension that it has high transmissibility, it attaches strongly to the lung receptors and may not respond to monoclonal antibodies. Also, it may have immune escape. In Maharashtra, level 3 restrictions are in place.
- Other people such as home guards, school teachers can be authorized, by order of the government, to fine people for not wearing a mask.
- The Disaster Management Act and the powers within the Act regarding offences and penalties were also discussed.
- Self-discipline is the only way.

Participants: Dr AK Agarwal, Dr Ashok Gupta, Dr KK Kalra, Prof Bejon Misra, Dr Anita Chakravarti, Dr Jayakrishnan Alapet, Dr DR Rai, Dr Ravi Kapur, Ms Balbir Verma, Ms Ira Gupta, Mr Saurabh Aggarwal, Dr S Sharma