

With Covid 19 Cases Decreasing should we Continue Covid Appropriate Behaviours?

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As new coronavirus infection as fall, and masking mandates lift, there is lots of confusion when to wear mask and follow other covid appropriate behaviours (CAB).

India has seen over 60% reduction in Covid 19 cases from 21 January 22 in the daily and weekly number of Covid 19 cases and fallen below the lowest number since April. On Tuesday the 22 March 2022, globally 3813665 cases and 4965 deaths due to Covid 19 were reported. India reported just 1,620 new cases and 62 new deaths down from a peak of nearly 3.5 Lakh cases on 20 January 2022. The relaxation in the restrictions is explicitly evident across all sates. However currently the countries like China, Germany, Australia, Austria, South Korea, Japan, Hongkong, and some parts of Europe. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and some Public Health experts feel that India may not go that way; but do advise use of masks and other non-medical practices to stay on.

India is home to 35 of the 50 cities with the worst air quality, according to the World Air Quality Report 2021, prepared by Swiss organisation IQ Air released recently. While Bhiwadi in Rajasthan is the most polluted city followed by Ghaziabad in UP, both are part of National Capital Region (NCR). Delhi was found to be the most polluted capital in the world for the fourth consecutive year in 2021.

Saturday 20 March 2022, GOI asked all sates to continue to follow fivefold Covid strategy, that include Testing (RTPCR test for all Influenza like illness individuals and severe acute respiratory illnesses -SARI), Tracking (the contacts of Covid 19 positive cases,

Treating (all symptomatic cases either at home or in hospitals) Vaccination (any of the available 5 vaccines in the country) and full adherence to Covid 19 appropriate behaviour. Governments will make all out efforts to focus on sustained genomic sequencing for timely detection of new variants as and when they appear.

Community to Contribute with Covid appropriate behaviour

While the national and sate government do the best in the medical interventions including monitoring of emergence of new variants of the viruses, case management and vaccination, the people too need to paly their role of following Covid appropriate behaviours. But the general observations indicate that most people are flouting the norms since the beginning of 2022. In the urban areas air pollution is the biggest risk factor all respiratory diseases including Covid 19. Use of masks, avoiding crowd and keeping safe distance from others and frequent washing soiled hand with soap and water are simple but practical approaches we know of the prevent droplet and airborne transmission of the respiratory diseases.

Relaxation of curbs must continue but at what cost?

A recent statement from ICMR says that 'Public Health Approach is not living in fear for ever' and advocates for easing curbs with caution. This caution for me is to follow covid appropriate behaviours. As new coronavirus infections fall, and masking mandates lift there are lots of confusion about when to wear mask and follow other covid appropriate behaviour. As a result, we see in practice is most people flouting the same first. The use of masks has

dropped below 25% in March 2022 as compared to around 70% in December 2021 based on the field visits of the authors in 2 districts of Karnataka in March 2022.

Reasons for Covid appropriate behaviours

The covid appropriate behaviours not only benefit individuals but also people around us. However, they are a bit cumbersome to practice, especially during ensuing summer months.

Washing hands with soap and water will be the main stay as most of the sanitiser production companies have either slashed the production or have exited. They estimate that the sales of sanitisers has dropped down to 10-15% of the peak covid months.

Solutions

Masking up Outdoors: Now is the time to upgrade to N95 masks rather than usual cotton masks due to Omicron variants. Mask must cover your nose and mouth.

- **General:** If you do not feel wind on your face, you are in a poorly ventilated space and if you are with shoulder to shoulder with other people is a clear case for using mask
- **Morning walks:** If you are on sidewalks and parks the value add is very little
- **Shopping:** Priority is to follow the norms and rules of the business house you are entering. If the shops/mall has masks as optional, consider space, airflow, and crowds to decide if the wear a mask.
- **Gyms:** Follow the norms of the Gym
- **Public Transports/Transits:** Better wear masks in flight, trains, metros, and buses as you are with strangers whose infections and immunity status are unknown and you are in closed space
- **Common cold and Sniffles:** When you feel bit sick or indisposed, better stay home or if you must go out better use masks, you could be shedding viruses into the air and transmitting to others.

Masking Indoors

- **People with compromised Immunity:** Persons having compromised immunity or live with someone with compromised immunity wear a mask and maintain minimum social distance (2 meters) as the viruses collect
- **Unvaccinated Persons:** Person unvaccinated or encountering unvaccinated must use masks

- **Hospital Visits:** While visiting any hospital for any purpose must use mask as there are many infected persons or vulnerable patients. Even if you are vaccinated, the risk of getting Covid 19 or long covid -19 or other respiratory infection will be there.

Social distancing

Avoid places of not just mass gatherings like marriages, religious congregations, but even shopping malls, stadiums, and movie theatres. If you must be around people, maintain 2 meters (6 feet) from others around you as much as possible. If compelled to go use masks and maintain a safe distance

Hand Washing

It is crucial to maintain hygiene standards like washing your hands frequently, especially if you have travelled by public transport. Using an alcohol sanitizer, in case you are travelling to disinfect your hands, and avoiding touching your hand or mouth.

Use of disinfectants

Use of disinfectants must be limited to places where washing facilities are not available. Some disinfectants do cause skin allergies and sensitivity.

Surfaces disinfecting

Recent research evaluated the survival of the COVID-19 virus on different surfaces and reported that the virus can remain viable for up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel, up to four hours on copper, and up to 24 hours on cardboard. However disinfecting table and furniture's is not advocated but washing hands if you touch any of these surfaces is better.

Use of air conditioners

Owing to the heat and humidity, the use of an air conditioner is unavoidable for the next 3-4 months, especially in regions with hot climate. The standalone air conditioners used in homes are relatively safe to use but open all windows whenever possible for fresh air circulation. Window can also be kept minimally open when the AC is running. The temperature of a home run AC should be 24-30 degree Celsius, and the humidity should be between 40-70%.

Government does what it can but if we don't defend our own interest who will?