

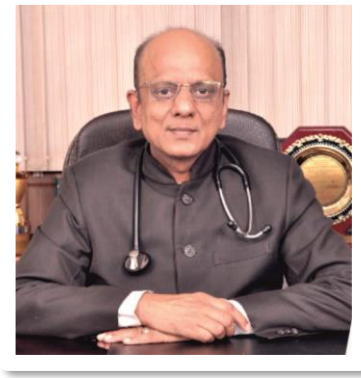


Resurgence of COVID-19: Mutation and Other Factors

illness to Wellness

June 2021

In fond memory of...



Padma Shri Dr K K Aggarwal

Padma Shri awardee Dr K K Aggarwal left for his heavenly abode on 17th May 2021. A leading cardiologist, he was the Head of the Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Former President of the Indian Medical Association (IMA).

Over the past year, Dr Aggarwal dedicated a lot of his efforts towards clarifying COVID-19-related queries and held talks regarding various aspects of the disease and its management.

We deeply mourn the loss of this great leader, who was relentless in his efforts to promote the availability of quality healthcare for all. We were fortunate to have him share his insights with us.

Resurgence of COVID-19: Mutation and Other Factors

ASSOCHAM Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility (AFCSR) launched a national awareness programme, 'Illness to Wellness', to promote healthy living in association with SAVLON. The series aimed to educate people across India and abroad about various health-related matters, especially amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, multiple experts were invited to share insights on precautions, treatments, and other related issues.

In March 2021, ASSOCHAM organized a session on the topic '**Resurgence of COVID-19: Mutation and other factors**' as a part of its 'Illness to Wellness' series, focusing on the increase in the incidence of COVID-19 cases. Expert panelists also discussed how India could deal with the situation and contain the pandemic and minimize the impact on human life and businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic originated in Wuhan City, China, in 2019 and later spread to around 195 countries across the globe.¹ On March 25, 2020, a nationwide lockdown was announced in India to curb the spread of the virus², which was eased in June 2020, with the government allowing restaurants, hotels, shopping centers, and places of worship to re-open.

This opening of the economy provides a breather to businesses struggling with supply chain disruptions, workforce availability, and lower consumer demand.³

The introduction of the vaccine brought a ray of hope to the world, especially India, which had started moving towards economic recovery, supported by various measures introduced by the government and agility displayed by businesses.



1. From Lockdown To Normalcy, Timeline Of Coronavirus Outbreak In Wuhan; Republic World, March 24, 2020
2. Modi's Hasty Coronavirus Lockdown of India Leaves Many Fearful for What Comes Next; Time, March 31, 2020
3. Coronavirus: India to loosen lockdown despite record cases; BBC, May 30, 2020



Resurgence of COVID-19: Mutation and Other Factors

To revive the economy, the government introduced an economic stimulus package in May 2020. Since then, two more packages have been announced by the government, which supported various sectors, including rural employment, COVID-19 vaccine research, and Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana. Moreover, the government plans to launch Aatmanirbhar Health Programme with an outlay of INR 64,180 crore.⁴

The government has also rolled out a production-linked incentive scheme (PLI) for smartphones and other technology-driven sectors. The scheme aims to enhance domestic manufacturing and exports and expand the country's production by INR 38,039 lakh crore (USD 520 billion) in the next five years (2021-2026).⁵

The country launched the largest vaccination drive in the world on January 16, 2021.⁶ However, the increasing mutation and strains led to a rise in the number of cases. India surpassed Brazil to emerge as the second worst-hit nation globally with 13.53 million cases as of April 12, 2021.⁷

India witnessed an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases in the second wave, which started emerging in February 2021. At the start of the second wave, the confirmed cases in the country stood at 11,000 cases, and the daily average (next 50 days) stood at 22,000 cases. However, in the following ten days, the daily average in the country witnessed a sharp spike with 89,800 cases.

**Inappropriate
COVID-19
behavior**

**Presence of
mutating and
virulent
variants**

**Vaccine
hesitancy due
to lack of
awareness**

**Myths
surrounding
the ill-effects
of the vaccine**

**Inconsistent
containment
and mitigation
measures**

4. Budget 2021: Aatmanirbhar Packages Totalling Rs 27.1 lakh Crore Accelerated Structural Reforms, Says Finance Minister; India.com, February 2021
5. PLI scheme likely to boost India's manufacturing output by \$520 billion in 5 years: PM Modi; The Hindu, March 5, 2021
6. India rolls out the world's largest COVID-19 vaccination drive; World Health Organization, January 16, 2021
7. Covid-19: India overtakes Brazil as world's second worst-hit country; The Times of India, April 12, 2021



Resurgence of COVID-19: Mutation and Other Factors

Cities that are adversely affected due to the pandemic included Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad, with these cities witnessing a surge in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. Other cities such as Lucknow, Bhopal, Kolkata, Allahabad, and Surat were quite similar.⁸ To combat the critical challenge, a full lockdown was announced in Delhi in the second half of April 2021. Since then, COVID cases have been steadily declining, and the recovery rate has been rising.⁹ On May 20, 2021, Delhi reported 3,231 new cases, with a positivity rate dropping to 5 per cent compared to 35 per cent in April. However, the situation in other cities is worsening, and they have resorted to similar measures to contain the spread of the virus.

The experts also stated that the second wave is always expected to be stronger than the first wave. However, contrary to popular belief and reports, the experts

anticipate that the third wave will be milder as most people will either be immunized or infected by then.

The panel discussed how the UK variant is highly infectious and the master variant. A study published by the British Medical Journal supports this argument by stating that the UK variant is deadly, with a 64 per cent higher risk of dying compared to other variants. The virus is found to be 50 per cent more transmissible.¹⁰

Dr K K Aggarwal, President, Confederation of Medical Associations of Asia, shared that 85 per cent of infections in the country were due to the UK strain, followed by less than 30 per cent infections by India's double mutation strain. However, recent studies published by World Health Organization (WHO) have classified India's double-mutation variant as the 'variant of interest'.

Expert views

The UK variant is expected to be the predominant in India. According to Dr. K K Aggarwal, 85% of the infections are due to the UK strain, infections due to India's double mutation strain is less than 30%

Inappropriate COVID-19 behavior, and mutations in the virus led to the resurgence of COVID-19

Urgent need to create awareness about the vaccine through various media

Lockdowns can only help so far, an accelerated vaccination drive is essential

- h) Resurgence of COVID-19 in India: A Tale of Six Unlearnt Lessons; The Wire, April 8, 2021
- i) Covid-19 in India: Why coronavirus second wave is devastating; April 20, 2021
- j) Covid variant first found in the U.K. appears to be 64% more deadly than earlier strains, study finds; CNBC, March 11, 2021



Resurgence of COVID-19: Mutation and Other Factors

WHO believes that the variant spreading in India - B.1.617, also referred to as double mutant strain, is expected to emerge as the "variant of concern" as it has mutations that can increase transmission. The B.1.617 has been reported in several states such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Chhattisgarh.¹¹ According to WHO, an increase in infections might lead to new and more dangerous variants in the country.¹²

The Government has taken various preventive measures to overcome the shortage of hospital beds by converting hospitals into COVID-19 facilities, drafting hotels to serve as hospitals, and encouraging manufacturers to ramp up vaccine production.¹³ Due to a surge in COVID-19 cases, the country should look towards enhancing its health infrastructure. During this time, global and Indian companies also offered their support to the country, helping airlift or

ship oxygen concentrators, cryogenic containers and ventilators. Many leading Indian players stopped producing some of the raw materials used in their manufacturing value chain to provide oxygen from their plants.

Given the vastness of India, its large population and the rising spread of the contagion to the hinterlands, which were initially insulated, there is an urgent need to produce vaccines at a faster pace. According to experts, to achieve herd immunity in one year, the country would have to have vaccinated about 60 per cent of the population.¹⁴

The experts supported the Government's stance that strict nationwide lockdown is not the solution. Instead, they emphasized the need to push the vaccination drive intensively and introduce proactive approaches such as organizing vaccination camps in societies in collaboration with RWAs, NGOs, and other associations.

11. India Covid: Government says new variant linked to surge; BBC News, May 6, 2021

12. Virus strain in India has mutations that increase transmission, says top WHO scientist; Scroll.in, May 10, 2021

13. To Fight the Deadly Second Wave, a Lockdown Is the Only Available Strategy; The Wire, April 25, 2021

14. Resurgence of COVID-19 in India: A Tale of Six Unlearned Lessons; The Wire, April 8, 2021



ASSOCHAM recommendations

- Reinforce the strategy to **encourage the citizens to get vaccinated**, including timely adherence to the second dose
- Ensure **continuity of vaccine supplies** through government channels for at least 90 days till the **private sector establishes its procurement channels** and supply chains with all major manufacturers globally
- Establish a **single-window for the private sector** to procure vaccines and reimburse costs to ensure uninterrupted supplies.
- Set up mass vaccination centers** in stadiums, hotel banquets centers/banquet halls, theatres, schools, malls etc.
- Incentivize people below a certain income level** with a free Ayushman insurance policy with successful completion of the second dose
- Monitor the changing patterns and new strains** through extensive data from all states
- Collect and share data on re-infected cases of fully vaccinated**, and COVID affected people in terms of severity in hospitalization for effective and collaborative research
- Ramp up genetic sequencing of positive Covid-19 test samples** to catch new variants quickly as the virus mutates
- Continue sensitizing people about the **importance of vaccination, masking, sanitization, and social distancing**



Resurgence of COVID-19: Mutation and Other Factors

Panel experts

- Dr. Rajesh Kesari, Founder & Director, Total Care Control
- Dr. K K Aggarwal, President, Confederation of Medical Associations of Asia
- Dr. Tarun Sahni, Founder & Director, Advent Healthcare Private Limited and Head of Hyperbaric Medicine & Senior Consultant Internal Medicine, Apollo Hospital
- Dr. Gautam Bhansali, Consultant Physician, Bombay Hospital and Medical Research Centre;
- Dr. K K Talwar, Chairman, PSRI Heart Institute
- Dr. P Venkata Krishnan, Senior Consultant - Internal Medicine, Artemis Hospitals

Thank you....

We extend our deepest gratitude for the individuals that contribute to the health of our community and have invested their life in caring for others. Amidst this pandemic our frontline workers are the true heroes, leading the relentless fight to keep us safe.

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