

Social distancing: social vaccine for COVID-19

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An unpredictable and infectious disease, COVID-19, has spread worldwide with greater extent and messed up many states, including the developed countries like UK and USA. According to South Morning China Post, the first case of it was reported in Hubei, but got highlighted after the rising infected cases from Wuhan, China (1). Level of severity can easily be understood that WHO has announced it as a Pandemic on 11th March, 2020. Till this Date, 118,000 cases had been confirmed for COVID-19 in 114 countries in which 4,291 had decreased (2). The spreading rate of infection is too high that from 11th March, 2020 to 30th May, 2020, the total confirmed cases were 6,047,501 in 217 countries with 367,149 decreased worldwide (3). In India, first case was reported in a medical student from Wuhan, China on 30th January, 2020 and after 4 months, total confirmed case reported by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare was 216,919 with 6,075 decreases as of 4th June, 2020 (4).

In the current scenario when we don't have any proved and tested vaccine or drug against this virus, it becomes necessary to break the chain of infection. Social distancing is one of the non-pharmaceutical prevention. Need of social distancing has been realized by every country who are facing the COVID-19 problem, and thus, these countries have been implementing total or partial 'Lockdown' in spite of heavy economic crunch. In India also, citizens have to be stay under 'Lockdown' since 25th March, 2020.

Social distancing actually means "physical distance" between two people without disturbing their social connectivity through various other means like video conferencing, chat or mail. Physical distance of at least 6 feet is being prescribed against the communicable disease COVID-19 to keep healthy person away from the expelled tiny particles and large droplet, spewed through a cough or sneeze, from the infected person (5). Social distance is the first step to prevent the person to come in contact with the COVID-19 carrier person and materials. Researchers found that the symptom of COVID-19 may take 4-14 days, sometime more than 14 days, to develop while in some cases, no symptom was found in the COVID-19 positive patient. Further, transmission by asymptomatic infected person is also a major problem. In this situation, social distance becomes more important when the infected person or carriers can't be recognized and persons are unwittingly spreading the virus (5).

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has also released the following advisory on Social Distance measures (6).

1. Closure of all educational establishments like school, universities, gyms, cultural and social centers, etc. Online education to be promoted.
2. Postponed the examination and promoted the students based on previous performance.
3. Encourage “work from home” wherever feasible for employees by employers.
4. Minimize the meeting and prefer video conferencing.
5. Physical distancing minimum of 1 meter has been ensured between tables of restaurants. Simultaneously, all commercial activities must keep a distance of 1 meter between customers.
6. Nonessential social and cultural gathering must be avoided. Maximum 50 persons can be gathered in marriage and 20 at funeral.
7. If possible, sports and competition events may be advised to postpone.
8. Regulate the working hours in office’s shifts.
9. Avoid non-essential travel. Proper disinfection and social distance must be maintained in public transport.
10. Avoid greeting by hand shaking and hugging. A mask will be must for all before going outside.
11. To prevent the infection, person returning from any places is instructed to follow the quarantine rule by the respective states.

Social distancing is little bit a challenge in Indian contest due to citizen behavior and space crunch. Here, 100 million homes (40% of all homes) have only one room in which an average five members of the family are living (7). Further, 30% of the city’s population in slum in which 60% of residents are staying in houses of smaller than 215 sq. feet (8). As compared to other countries, Indians are more social. Mostly in the village, there are joint and large families that prefer social connectedness. Somewhere it is misconception in the village, “Corona is only in cities, everything is fine in villages” (7).

In India, which is the second largest populated country (135 crores) in the world and 145th rank in term of health care quality and accessibility among 195 countries, the situation might be out of control or worse if the lockdown and social distancing had not been applied. On 24 March, 2020, our Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, said at the time of first Lockdown,

“All leading experts say 21 days is the minimum we require to break the corona virus transmission cycle. If we are not able to handle these 21 days, the country and your family will go back 21 years and many families will be destroyed” (9).

Despite of the various hurdles, our Indian citizens have shown discipline and togetherness for observing social distance. Union health ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said, “If we take the ‘R0’ to be 2.5 then one positive person can infect 406 people in 30 days, if the lockdown and social distancing measures are not in place, but if the social exposure is reduced by 75% then that one sick person will only be able to infect only 2.5 persons”. Hence, he has requested to follow the social distancing as ‘Social distancing is a social vaccine in management of COVID-19’ (10).

Reference

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