

Gujarat experts take the frontline By Brendan Dabhi, Ahmedab

IN THE BATTLE AGAINST DEADLYCORONAVIRUS

Infectious disease experts from IIPH Gandhinagar worked with NCDC to investigate coronavirus contact transmission in Delhi and help contain the spread of the highly contagious illness

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At a time when coronavirus claimed two lives and confirmed cases touched 81 in India, authorities are pulling out all stops to contain its spread including banning large gatherings. But, residents of 24 societies in Nava Vadaj, who probably believe in the power of dua over dava, got together to perform 'Corona Ahuti Yagna'. Scientists are doing everything possible to create an antidote to tackle the global pandemic. Former councillor Manubhai Bharwad, however, thought it unwise to wait for science to do the job and chose to organise the havan at Kirtan Flats to combat the highly infectious disease.

Gujarat has not seen a single positive case of coronavirus so far. But, the State has played an important role in the battle raging on the frontlines against the highly contagious disease in India. Experts from the Indian Institute of Public Health in Gandhinagar (IIPH-G) identified people who came in contact with patients involved in the first major outbreak in the national capital and helped in containing the spread of the febrile respiratory illness.

The two senior infectious diseases experts, who cannot be named at this time, investigated the possible sources of contacts and suspected transmission of Covid-19 from 14 patients who tested positive in Delhi and are currently quarantined in Safdarjung Hospital.

News of the first coronavirus patient sparked a wave of panic in the national capital. Multiple schools were shut down in Noida and the Hyatt Regency in Delhi asked its employees to selfquarantine for 14 days.

With a virus that spreads at such an unprecedented pace, it is a task to identify potential victims. This is why the investigators, who have long worked on major disease outbreaks like leptospirosis and swine flu in Surat, were invited to work on the project by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), said highly placed sources at IIPH-G, a part of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). The experts had also worked on the Zika preparedness plan during the last outbreak.

The duo went to Delhi at the end of February and worked in collaboration with Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) officials. Under IDSP, data is collected on epidemic-prone diseases on weekly basis. The data is collected in three formats: S or suspected cases, P or presumptive cases and L or laboratory confirmed cases.

Such data is filed by health workers, clinicians and laboratory staff respectively. The data gives information as well as seasonality of the diseases. The Rapid Response Teams jumps in to diagnose

and control an outbreak if there is a rising trend of illnesses in any area. The aforementioned surveillance units analyse data and actions regularly.

The experts from Gujarat were given access to the contacts and case history of people who may have possibly come in touch with the first patient after he landed in India, and helped identify possible patients.

Almost all 14 cases could be traced back to the initial patient, a Delhi NCR resident who had returned from Vienna in Austria on February 25, and then visited Agra. The man had also attended a birthday party at a hotel with his child, leading to two schools in Noida also being sanitized as a precautionary measure.

However, sources said that all 14 patients are in good health and recovering fast. None of them had to be put on ventilator as they were largely asymptomatic.

After submitting a report to the NCDC that is overseeing the spread and containment of the pandemic, the two have returned to Gujarat.

The researchers as well as the director of the institute refused to comment on the issue.

PM MODI'S VISIT TO GUJARAT CANCELLED

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Gujarat has been cancelled due to coronavirus concerns, informed Health Minister Nitin Patel on Friday. The DyCM said that new dates would be finalised later. "In view of the current coronavirus situation and a recent central government advisory asking states to avoid organising any large gatherings or seminars, PM's visit to Gujarat on March 21 and 22 has been postponed," he said. Though no positive case has been reported from Gujarat so far, Patel said the state govt is taking all necessary steps to avoid the spread of the virus in view of positive cases reported from neighbouring Maharashtra and other states.

THREE SUSPECTED CASES IN STATE

Three suspect cases of coronavirus were reported in Gujarat on Friday. The patients included a Kutch resident who had come from Dubai, a resident of Ahmedabad who had also returned from Dubai, and a Surat resident who had returned from a trip to Singapore and Bali. Their samples have been collected for testing in Ahmedabad and results are awaited, informed health department officials.

Meanwhile, four doctors from Palanpur, who just returned from Australia, were taken for screening to the district hospital on Friday night. Whether they need to be quarantined and their samples taken for testing would be decided after this, said officials.

'DISCOURAGE LITIGANTS FROM ATTENDING COURT'

The Gujarat High Court on Friday registered a suo motu PIL and issued notice to the state

government to stop spread of coronavirus in the judicial set-up. The division bench of Chief Justice Vikram Nath and Justice A J Shastri asked government to apprise it of details of the persons, if any, affected by coronavirus in Gujarat and “steps taken by the government with regard to their treatment”. The matter will be heard on March 20.

The bench also asked authorities to take necessary steps to sanitise the court building and premises daily by using appropriate formulations. The bench asked the advocates to “discourage” litigants from attending courts. “Absence of parties appearing in person may not entail any adverse orders,” said Nath in his order, adding that instead of handshakes, people should greet people with folded hands.

Nath added that these directions “be equally applied to all the subordinate courts in the state of Gujarat”

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