ICMR to test for Community Transmission of COVID-19

Why in News

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has announced that it would start testing influenza patients **without any travel history or contact with** novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) **for signs of community transmission.**

Four Stages of Transmission of COVID-19

- **Stage 1-Imported Transmission**

  - It is reported among the travellers **entering the country** via the **borders and airports.**
  - These can be controlled through thermal screening and quarantine.
  - To prevent imported transmissions, India has suspended visas to foreign nationals and the facility of visa-free travel to **Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card-holders.**
- **Stage 2-Local Transmission**

  - The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** defines it as the transmission through **direct contact with an infected person within the country.**
- **Stage 3-Community Transmission**

  - It signifies that a virus is circulating in the community and can affect people with no history of travel to affected areas or of contact with an infected person.
  - India's current emphasis on social distancing and discouragement of public gatherings is aimed at checking community transmission.
  - Once community transmission begins, it is more difficult to trace contacts. As one unknown source of infection can infect many people unknowingly.
  - Among the countries where community transmission seems to have begun are China, Italy and South Korea.
- **Stage 4- Epidemic**

  - An **epidemic** is a large outbreak, one that spreads among a population or region.
  - It is less severe than pandemic due to a limited area of spread.

Level of Transmission in India

- So far, most of the cases in India have had a history of travel abroad or have contracted the disease from somebody around them.
- However, some of the cases in the country had neither any history of foreign travel nor had they come directly in contact with an infected person.
- **Currently, India is at Stage 2 of Local Transmission** and precautions are being taken to prevent it from entering Stage 3 of Community Transmission.

India's Current Strategy to tackle COVID-19

- **Social Distancing and Cluster Containment:**

- The cluster containment strategy intends to contain the disease within a defined geographic area by early detection, breaking the chain of transmission and thus preventing its spread to new areas.
- It includes geographic quarantine, social distancing measures, enhanced active surveillance, testing all suspected cases, isolation of cases, home quarantine of contacts, social mobilization to follow preventive public health measures.

- **Possible Involvement of the Private Sector:**

  - The government is working with private hospitals to develop standard operating procedures for treatment and isolation of patients.
  - The involvement of the private sector may face some issues like **the possibility of profiteering, affordability issues, crowding of people at a large number of places, etc.**

Global Scenario

- **Italy** followed a **model of lockdown** whereas **South Korea** has observed a **model of free testing.**

  - **India** has been following the **Italian model of lockdown.**
- **China** has adopted a **graded approach,** and the number of new cases are gradually declining.

  - It has locked down Hubei, the epicentre. Elsewhere, it enforced social distancing measures.

Indian Council of Medical Research

- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is the **apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.**
- Its mandate is to conduct, coordinate and implement medical research for the benefit of the Society; translating medical innovations into products/processes and introducing them into the public health system.
- It is **funded by** the Government of India through the Department of Health Research, **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.**

Source: IE

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