Flattening the COVID-19 Curve - Testing

What is the issue?

- The spread of COVID-19 cases does not seem to be slowing down globally and in India, and the death toll continues to rise alarmingly.
- To move ahead, India needs a comprehensive approach focussed on wider testing.

What is the cases scenario globally?

- After a sharp increase in March 2020, the fresh cases reported have steadily increased.
- The case have breached the 10 million mark by June 2020 end.
- The death toll too touched a grim milestone of 0.5 million.
- With the addition of each million new cases taking fewer days than the previous one, the pandemic is truly accelerating.
- June 2020 alone accounted for 60% of all cases reported so far.
- The second half of June has been particularly bad with over 1,50,000 cases reported almost daily.
- U.S. (2.7 million), Brazil (nearly 1.5 million) and India (0.6 million) have been driving the spike in cases.

What is the case with India?

- As on 3 July 2020, India has reported over 0.6 million cases and 18,662 deaths.
- The acceleration of fresh cases began in the first week of May and increased sharply in June.
- While Maharashtra has the most cases, infections in Tamil Nadu and Delhi have been steadily increasing.
- With over 92,000 cases, Delhi has surpassed China (nearly 85,000).
- On the other hand, Mumbai (just over 82,000) and Chennai (64,000 plus) are close behind.

How important is testing?

- After months of low testing, Delhi increased the number of tests done per

day to close to 20,000.

- Though belated, Tamil Nadu began aggressively testing in hotspot areas in Chennai weeks ago.
- It moved from a smaller number of targeted tests to increased community testing about 2 weeks ago.
- This has led to the test positivity rate reducing from 35% to about 20% in certain areas in Chennai.
- A test positivity rate of about 20% is highly suggestive of community spread in these areas.
- Certainly, testing enough helps in deciding on the level of intervention needed.
- However, equally important is tracing and isolating contacts.
- Fortunately, Tamil Nadu has a case fatality rate of 1.3%.
- This is the lowest when compared with 4.4% in Maharashtra, 3.1% in Delhi, and 5.6% in Gujarat.

What is the way forward?

- It is important for every State to learn from Maharashtra, to test large numbers daily unmindful of the rise in fresh cases each day.
- Being hesitant to testing, tracing, isolating and treating will inevitably lead to uncontrolled spread and increased deaths.
- China, Italy, and Spain have demonstrated that it is possible to bend the curve through a comprehensive approach that is centred around testing.
- It is high time that India works on its testing strategies for similar results.

Source: The Hindu

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