

Preventing the Emergence of Corona Virus Disease 2019 Outbreak in Mass Gatherings: Appeal to Public Health Authorities

Dear Editor,

The Corona Virus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has been declared as the first Public Health Emergency of International Concern of the 2020-2029 decade. The available global estimates revealed that on 17 February 2020 alone, a total of 2162 new cases were detected, taking the overall total to more than 71400 cases.^[1] From the mortality perspective, the disease has resulted in 1775 deaths worldwide.^[1]

The current epidemiological trends suggest that airborne route is the most common route for transmission of the disease between human-to-human, and thus the potential risk of disease transmission will be very high in any crowded place or in mass gatherings.^[2] In other words, it is extremely crucial to manage mass gatherings and the preparedness activities should begin right from the planning phase before the event begins, to the operational phase and even after completion of the event.^[2]

In the planning phase, strong systems and strategies should be planned and implemented to avert/manage any potential outbreak of the disease.^[2] This essentially includes fostering liaison with the public health authorities at different levels, assessment of the risk in the earmarked setting with regard to the dynamics of the disease transmission, the density of the people, age-distribution, the nature of contact between the participants, type and duration of the event, mode of transport of participants, etc.^[2]

The best approach will be to devise a disease-specific action plan based on the identified risks, which apart from strengthening of the risk communication and community engagement, capacity building, and resource assessment should also target screening of participants on arrival, disease surveillance, treatment, and dissemination of information.^[2] As far as the operational phase is concerned, no such incidents have been reported; nevertheless, we have to strengthen the domains of risk communication, especially pertaining to the content of the key message regarding prevention – treatment options – do's and don'ts, and selection of mode of communication.^[2]

In case, any patient becomes symptomatic during the course of the gathering itself, the concerned participants need to be

isolated and subjected to standard diagnostic and treatment procedures as per the protocol.^[3] In the post-event stage of the mass gatherings, the organizers should share the details (namely, itinerary, contact number, accommodation details, etc.) about all the symptomatic participants and other potential contacts. Further, the parent health authorities should be notified about these symptomatic individuals, so that they can prepare themselves to mount an effective response.^[2]

In conclusion, it is crucial to avert any major outbreaks of the COVID-19 in any of the mass gatherings and thus it becomes really essential to focus on the planning, organizing, and post-event phase, and both the organizers and health authorities should work in collaboration to prevent any such untoward incident.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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