



Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal



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-Sharpening the COVID-19 Response through Communications Intelligence

Date: July 8, 2021
Kathmandu, Nepal

EMERGING THEME(S)

- Nepal reported 2,077 fresh COVID-19 cases, 28 fatalities on July 7; with relaxation of prohibitory orders, COVID-19 cases increasing in Kavre, Sudurpaschim Province; Kathmandu public transport vehicles and businesses flouting safety health protocols, health experts fear a 'stressful situation'
- Possible red-tapism could deter vaccine clinical trials in Nepal, say Health Research Council officials

RECURRING THEME(S)

- Nepal getting Johnson & Johnson's single-shot COVID-19 vaccine under COVAX, quantity and delivery date to be confirmed after a week, says Chief of Family Welfare Division Dr Taranath Pokharel
- Government orders hospitals that have billed both patients and government for COVID-19 treatment of patients to return the amount charged from patients
- Second dose of Vero Cell to be administered to those in the target age group from July 8 onwards
- Health Ministry to deploy 1,077 public health inspectors in villages of Nepal for control and containment of COVID-19 pandemic

¹ This intelligence is tracked through manually monitoring national print, digital and online media through a representative sample selection, and consultations with media persons and media influencers.

ISSUE(S) IN FOCUS

Nepal's coronavirus caseload reached 650,162 on July 7 with 2,077 more people testing positive for the infection in the past 24 hours, while the countrywide COVID-19 mortality toll shifted to 9,291 with 28 more fatalities.²

The number of people infected with COVID-19 has increased in Kavre with the relaxation of the prohibitory orders, as per Dr Narendra Kumar Jha, Senior Health Administrator of Health Office Kavre. This is because people's carelessness has increased with the relaxation while the tests have also increased, he said.³

The number of people infected with COVID-19 has increased in Sudurpaschim Province with the relaxation of the prohibitory orders. The infection was confirmed in 61 people of the Province on June 6. The tests have reduced but the infection rate has remained the same, as per the doctors there.⁴

A total of 28 people have lost their lives due to COVID-19 infection in Dailekh as of July 5. The risk of the infection still exists in the district, but the leaders and cadres of different political parties are taking it lightly. They have been staging protest programs that invite crowds. No public health protocols were followed in a recent political program.⁵

The Ministry of Health and Population has urged the public to follow public health protocols strictly to reduce the risk of the third wave of COVID-19 infection. Dr Krishna Prasad Paudel, Spokesperson at the Ministry of Health and Population said as the COVID-19 infection can spread from the air too, people should stay in an open space at workplaces too.⁶

More than 10,000 personnel of Nepal Police have been infected with COVID-19 in the first and the second wave, while 17 have succumbed to the contagion.⁷

² THT Online

³ Kantipur

⁴ Annapurna Post

⁵ Annapurna Post

⁶ Baarhakhari

⁷ Baarhakhari

As per the new rule of easing restrictions in Kathmandu Valley, public transport vehicles should not carry passengers beyond their seating capacities but many public vehicles were carrying more passengers on July 6. All kinds of shops have reopened in breach of the prohibitory orders. Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, Chief of the Clinical Research Unit at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Diseases Hospital at Teku says Kathmandu Valley is still at the risk of virus transmission and such mismanagement may lead to a “stressful situation”.⁸

The government can impose conditions on foreign companies for conducting clinical trials of their vaccines as per the Vaccine Clinical Trial Guidelines approved by the Cabinet on June 21. Even though the new guidelines pave the way for conducting clinical trial of vaccines in Nepal, officials at the Nepal Health Research Council say that the provision requiring Cabinet approval for every clinical trial would create hurdles in the process due to possible red-tapism. No clinical trial for any COVID-19 vaccine has been conducted in Nepal so far.⁹

Nepal is getting a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine produced by the US pharmaceutical company Johnson & Johnson under COVAX facility. The vaccine named Janssen can be used for everyone above the age of 18. It has been confirmed that Nepal will get the vaccine but the doses and the date of receiving it will be confirmed after a week, as per Dr Taranath Pokharel, Chief of the Family Welfare Division.¹⁰

Nepali Congress and member of the National Assembly Jitendra Dev has said the government has failed in its vaccine diplomacy. At a time when four nations of South Asia were able to get the vaccine with help from the US and Europe, Nepal not being able to do so is the government’s diplomatic failure, he said.¹¹

The government has ordered the private hospitals that have billed both the patients and the government for the treatment of COVID-19 patients — to return the patients’ money. The KIST Medical College, Nepal Medical College, Chitwan Medical College, Birat Hospital, and Medicare Hospital have been confirmed to have charged the patients as well as the government.¹²

⁸ The Kathmandu Post

⁹ The Kathmandu Post

¹⁰ Kantipur

¹¹ Onlinekhabar

¹² Nayapatrika

The second dose of Vero Cell vaccine will be given from July 8 in Surkhet. A total of 6,153 people of the district — that comprise those between the ages 62-64 and frontline workers — who have taken the first dose will be given the second shot.¹³

The people aged 60-65, who took the first dose of Vero Cell vaccine, will be given the second dose on July 8 and 9 in Parsa. A total of 8,693 will be given the second dose.¹⁴

The second dose of Vero Cell vaccine will be given to the people aged 60-64 on July 9 and 10 in Lalitpur.¹⁵

Nearly 1,300,000 Nepali citizens are yet to get the second dose of Covishield vaccine. It has been more than four months since they got the first shot.¹⁶

The 3,000 doses of Vero Cell vaccine received by the Gorkha district to inoculate the people of Chumanubri Rural Municipality, that shares border with China, have been stored in the godown of District Health Office. There is no alternative to supply the vaccine to the remote district other than a helicopter. However, the district has not been able to arrange a helicopter as of now, as per Rishiram Khatri, Cold Chain Inspector of Health Office, Gorkha.¹⁷

The Ministry of Health and Population will deploy public health inspectors to the villages of Nepal for the control and containment of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was unable to mobilize them even when the pandemic reached its peak in the first and second wave. Now, the government will be deploying 1,077 inspectors across the nation.¹⁸

¹³ Onlinekhabar

¹⁴ Onlinekhabar

¹⁵ Rastriya Samachar Samiti (in Setopati)

¹⁶ Setopati

¹⁷ Annapurna Post

¹⁸ Ratopati

OTHER(S)

National News

Many Nepali youth heading to South Korea are being returned from the airport despite doing their PCR tests from the laboratories as specified by the government for those going abroad. The government notice says anyone going abroad should do the test in government labs and in the A-listed labs in hospitals with a minimum 100-bed capacity. However, Baburam Kumal from Nawalparasi, who was going to South Korea via Qatar Airlines was not given the boarding pass stating that only the tests done in four labs approved by the South Korean embassy — Patan Hospital, Korea-Nepal Friendship Hospital, Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, and Star Hospital — were valid. He had done the test in the government-listed TU Biotech and he was denied from taking the flight.¹⁹

Most women working as domestic helpers have become jobless due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The households where they used to work have stopped calling them due to the fear of the infection, which has left them out of work.²⁰

The two-way airfare for Saudi Arabia is Rs 45,000, but the Himalaya Airlines has been charging an exorbitant fee amidst the COVID-19 pandemic — up to Rs 200,000 — from the Nepali laborers going to Saudi Arabia. It has said this includes the cost of quarantine as well. There is investment by Yeti group in the Himalaya Airlines that has been protected by the government too. A laborer has to work for seven months in the Gulf countries to earn this much money.²¹

¹⁹ Setopati

²⁰ Onlinekhabar

²¹ Nayapatrika

The June 5 Cabinet meeting has decided to resume all domestic and international flights. The flights will resume once the decision letter is received, as per Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Lila Nath Shrestha.²²

The government has said a three-star hotel can charge up to Rs 3,500 from Nepalis staying in quarantine after returning from abroad — it costs around Rs 35,000 for 10-day quarantine. However, the Amadablam hotel, which has the investment of Yeti group, charges up to Rs 100,000 for 10-day stay — it has been overcharging Rs 65,000 per customer. The Himalaya Airlines has been keeping the Nepalis returning from Saudi Arabia in this hotel.²³

The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, regarded as two of the best destinations for foreign employment, have announced that they won't allow laborers who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19. There is a possibility of other Gulf countries and Malaysia also implementing the same rule, as per Rohan Gurung, former president of Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies. This will create a problem for Nepalis going for foreign employment, he said. Of the total population from Nepal going for foreign employment, nearly 90 per cent go to Gulf countries and Malaysia, as per the government data. There is more chance for citizens of those countries in South Asia who get the vaccine first to get jobs in these nations.²⁴

Shops, hotels and restaurants opened in Jhapa from July 6 and are allowed to operate from 6:00 am to 5:00 pm. The decision to ease restrictions coincides with the highest number of day-wise confirmed COVID-19 cases in the district in the past week.²⁵

A non-governmental organization has distributed food to children — who are at risk due to the prohibitory orders — of three local levels of Sindhuli.²⁶

The Nepalis are seen 'lining up' everywhere. Thousands of Nepalis working in India had returned home amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as they have been facing difficulties to make ends meet, they have started making their way to India again in search of employment despite the risk of infection. People standing in queue to enter India can be seen at the border

²² Kantipur

²³ Nayapatrika

²⁴ Nagarik

²⁵ The Himalayan Times

²⁶ Kantipur

checkposts. Likewise, people are seen standing in line to get vaccinated as well. The government aims to inoculate 22,000,000 Nepali citizens with the COVID-19 vaccine, but only 843,954 have got both doses of vaccine as of now. Nearly 1,767,853, who have taken the first dose, are waiting for the second dose of the vaccine.²⁷

The Hetaunda Cement Industry Ltd, which is owned by the government, will suffer a loss of about Rs 250,000,000 due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the current fiscal year, a preliminary estimation has shown. It had suffered a similar loss in the last fiscal year as well.²⁸

International News

Germany's public health institute said on July 5 that Nepal, the United Kingdom, India, Portugal and Russia were no longer 'areas of variant concern', reducing travel restrictions for people arriving from those countries.²⁹

Britain's government says it is scrapping rules for self-isolation for those who are fully vaccinated starting mid-August as the country prepares to lift most remaining coronavirus restrictions.³⁰

²⁷ Nayapatrika

²⁸ Onlinekhabar

²⁹ Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

³⁰ The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

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