

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE**

**RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 416
TO BE ANSWERED ON 06.02.2024**

SCREENING OF INTERNATIONAL PASSENGERS

416. SHRI K.R. SURESH REDDY:

Will the **Minister of HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE** be pleased to state:

- a) whether Government has taken cognizance of the fact that the BF7 variant of the coronavirus has triggered panic in China, and the country has been logging lakhs of Covid cases every day;
- b) if so, the preventive steps that are proposed to be taken by Government, keeping in mind that the virus is highly transmissible, more than its Omicron siblings; and
- c) the efforts made/being made by Government to screen international passengers arriving in India randomly in order to avoid transmission of the virus, and also to increase the genome sequencing of samples?

ANSWER

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
(PROF. S. P. SINGH BAGHEL)**

(a): BF.7 is a sub-lineage of Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 that was first identified in May, 2022. The sub-lineage was reportedly responsible for the late-2022 wave of COVID-19 in China. The sub-lineage was characterized by relatively high transmissibility and growth advantage over other circulating variants at the time, however, no increase in severity or deaths were found to be associated with the sub-lineage. The BF.7 sub-lineage was first reported in India in the month of July, 2022.

(b) and (c): Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare continues to monitor the Covid-19 trajectory as well as its variants in circulation, in the country and globally. Overall, the trajectory of Covid-19 cases, including those due to Omicron sub-linages, in the country witnessed a slight upsurge last week of November, 2023 which peaked around late December, 2023 and is currently on the decline.

Further, in accordance with Ministry of Health & FW's 'Guidelines for International Arrivals' issued on 19th July, 2023, thermal screening of international travellers to India is conducted at the points of entry

To strengthen disease surveillance and monitor disease trends including Covid-19 and its variants, Government of India has strengthened Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), which monitors outbreak prone diseases and institutes requisite public health measures. Similarly, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has established a network of more than 150 Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDLs) for timely laboratory based confirmation of pathogens.

For timely detection of newer mutant variants of SARS-CoV-2 virus, Whole Genomic Sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 is carried out by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genome Sequencing (INSACOG) network in the country.

Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare through series of formal communications as well as virtual meetings, has advised all States/UTs to:

- Enhance Covid-19 surveillance across the country as per the 'Operational Guidelines for Revised Surveillance Strategy in context of COVID-19' issued by the Ministry.
- Ensure ramping up of RT-PCR based Covid-19 testing.
- Refer adequate number of positive Covid-19 samples to the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) network of laboratories for Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) to ensure timely detection of newer variant of virus.
- Monitor emerging evidences of Covid-19 cases, symptoms & case severity as well as to take stock of available health infrastructure including availability of hospitals beds, ventilators, ICU, medical oxygen, drugs, trained human resource etc. to enable timely and appropriate treatment of Covid-19 cases.
