



Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal



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-Sharpening the COVID-19 Response through Communications Intelligence

Date: July 30, 2021
Kathmandu, Nepal

EMERGING THEME(S)

- Nepal reported 2,335 new COVID-19 cases, 16 deaths on July 29; recovery rate has contracted to 94.1 per cent from 94.5 per cent on July 23; infection rate has reached 24.2 per cent from 20.7 per cent on July 20; 17 districts put under very high risk category; 10 local levels of Jhapa sealed to contain spread of COVID-19; Itahari shuts down all services for a week; prohibitory orders in Chitwan extended till August 8; hospital beds have started to fill up with COVID-19 patients once again
- We will face a third wave because of our complacency, children and the unvaccinated will be the most at risk, says Dr Sher Bahadur Pun; 54,460 children have been infected with COVID-19 in Nepal till July 28
- Mucormycosis cases might re-emerge once COVID-19 cases start surging again, warn health experts

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 witnessed 2,335 new COVID-19 cases on July 29, while the countrywide death toll due to the disease climbed to 9,807 with 16 new fatalities. Nepal's COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 94.1 per cent, and the fatality rate at 1.5 per cent with active COVID-19 cases having risen to 30,390.²

The rate of people recovering from COVID-19 infection has been decreasing in Nepal with the increase in COVID-19 infection. According to the data released by the Ministry of Health and Population, recovery decreased to 94.1 per cent on July 29 from 94.5 per cent on July 23.³

The COVID-19 infection has started to rise across the nation again. This has led to the increase in the pressure of patients in different hospitals.⁴

The third wave of COVID-19 seems to be inevitable due to the carelessness of people with the relaxation of the prohibitory orders. The Ministry of Health and Population has said the infection rate has reached 24.2 per cent in the past one week at a time when the vaccination drive is ongoing. It was only 20.7 per cent on July 20. With this the government has put 17 districts under the very high-risk category — Jhapa, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Rautahat, Kapilvastu, Arghakhanchi, Palpa, Gulmi, Pyuthan, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Dadeldhura, Baitadi, Doti, Achham, and Bajura.⁵

Ten local levels of Jhapa have been sealed with the spike in COVID-19 infection there. Mechinagar, Haldibari, Buddha Shanti, Kankai, Kamal, Damak, Gauradaha, Shivasatachhi, Arjundhara, and Birtamode have been sealed to stop the spread of COVID-19 infection.⁶

The Itahari Sub-Metropolitan City has shut down all services for a week due to the spread of the COVID-19. Yet the citizens of the sub-metropolis crowded the immunization centers to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Both the Itahari Sub-Metropolitan City

² THT Online

³ Ratopati

⁴ Kantipur

⁵ Annapurna Post

⁶ Onlinekhabar

and the public seemed careless about following public health protocols there, increasing risk of the spread of infection from the vaccination centers.⁷

The District Administration Office Chitwan has extended the prohibitory orders till August 8.⁸

The hospital beds have started to fill up with COVID-19 patients again. There were only 69 COVID-19 patients at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH) a week ago, but the number has almost double on July 28. Patients with COVID-19 pneumonia used to visit the hospital when the pandemic reached its peak in the second wave, and the current situation is also similar, as per Dr Santa Kumar Das, Coordinator of the COVID Management Committee of TUTH. The 22-bed High Dependency Unit and 15-bed ICU of Civil Hospital are also full of patients. The risk has increased with the hospital beds being filled with patients. Experts have said that there has been a sudden increase in the number of COVID-19 patients and the seriously ill patients being admitted to the hospital. They have advised the hospitals to arrange oxygen and other equipment immediately if the infection continues to spread at the current rate.⁹

The number of patients suffering from viral fever has increased abruptly at District Hospital, Jaleshwor in Mahottari. According to Medical Superintendent and acting office Chief of the hospital Dr Satish Sah, the number of viral fever patients visiting the hospital has increased in recent days — 60-70 per cent are found to be suffering from viral fever, while around 50 people suffering from viral fever visit the hospital on a daily basis.¹⁰

A separate COVID-19 dedicated building will be built on the premises of the Narayani Hospital keeping in mind the risk of COVID-19 infection. The contract for the construction process with the construction company has reached the final stage.¹¹

Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, Chief of Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Diseases Hospital, Teku, says that looking at the present COVID-19 scenario in Nepal, we are still at risk — the current infection status is just like the situation we experienced between the first and second waves. According to him, relaxing the restrictions has increased the risk of virus transmission as already we are seeing the number of cases going up. He believes that the fact that the cases have doubled shows that things are not normal and “because of our complacency we will face a third wave”. Dr Pun says we are

⁷ Annapurna Post

⁸ Baarhakhari

⁹ Kantipur

¹⁰ Rastriya Samachar Samiti (in The Himalayan Times)

¹¹ Onlinekhabar

not fully prepared for a third wave — if a new wave hits, all unvaccinated people will be at risk, not just the children. On the challenges that a third wave might bring, he says it will be related to children because there are fewer children’s hospitals and a limited number of pediatricians in Nepal. “Serious cases need intensive care, but we don’t have enough intensive care beds for children. The intensive care units for adults do not work for children because specialized doctors and special equipment are needed for treating children.”¹²

A total of 54,460 children have been infected with COVID-19 in Nepal till July 28, according to Dr Madan Upadhyaya, Chief of the Quality Standard and Regulation Division of the Ministry of Health and Population.¹³

The political parties in Kavre have violated the rules of prohibitory orders despite the daily increase in COVID-19 infection there. The prohibitory orders issued by the District Administration Office have banned gatherings, protests, mass rallies yet the political parties are organizing such activities.¹⁴

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, around two dozen cases of mucormycosis have been found across the country so far. “Of them, 18 received treatment with the government’s support,” said Krishna Prasad Paudel, Spokesperson at the Ministry. While the number of mucormycosis cases is not being found lately along with the reduction in COVID-19 cases since June, doctors said that new mucormycosis cases might emerge again if the COVID-19 cases again rise substantially. There are already indications that the COVID-19 cases are fast rising and the most deadly variant of COVID-19 called ‘Delta’ is circulating in the population.¹⁵

¹² The Kathmandu Post

¹³ Onlinekhabar

¹⁴ Kantipur

¹⁵ The Kathmandu Post

OTHER(S)

National News

VACCINATION: DRIVE & DEMAND

The vaccination against COVID-19 with Vero Cell vaccine resumed in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City from July 29. Those above the age of 50 who have missed the first dose of vaccine are being inoculated in this phase of vaccination.¹⁶

The citizens above the age of 45 are being vaccinated against COVID-19 with Vero Cell from July 30 in Lalitpur Metropolitan City (LMC). The immunization centers have been set up in all 29 wards of LMC.¹⁷

The locals of Biratnagar Metropolitan City staged a demonstration on its premises after Mayor Bhim Parajuli took the COVID-19 vaccine to the house of a cadre of Nepali Congress. He was chased away by the locals after he was caught with the vaccine in his cadre's residence.¹⁸

After the complaints of people with power giving unnecessary pressure and misusing the COVID-19 vaccine, the vaccination drive in Baglung has been stopped. It has been suspended until they receive further instructions from the Ministry of Health and Population as no age group was specified for this vaccination drive, according to Raju Khatri, Vaccine Supervisor of Health Office, Baglung.¹⁹

According to Dr Taranath Pokharel, Chief of the Family Division, Nepal has received a total of 9,782,850 doses of COVID-19 vaccine as of now. As per the government figures, 1,600,000 doses under grant assistance from China, and 6,000,000 doses of Vero Cell procured from China will arrive by Bhadra (September 16). Likewise, the 1,000,000 doses of Covishield vaccine

¹⁶ Onlinekhabar

¹⁷ Baarhakhari

¹⁸ Setopati

¹⁹ Ratopati

procured from India will arrive by the first week of Bhadra (third week of August). The 1,600,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine via COVAX program will also arrive by the first week of Bhadra.²⁰

The representatives from the Nepal Automobile Dealers Association met Health Minister Umesh Shrestha and demanded that the COVID-19 vaccines be provided to the human resources of the automobile sector.²¹

Yagya Bahadur BC, Social Development Minister of the Karnali Province, has said they will give the COVID-19 vaccine to hotel entrepreneurs there. Accepting the demand letter submitted by the Hotel Entrepreneurs' Association, Surkhet, BC said the vaccine will be arranged with priority for hoteliers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.²²

Finance Minister Janardan Sharma has requested Health Minister Umesh Shrestha to revise the current vaccination schedule and to start the processes to complete all vaccination against COVID-19 by Asoj (October 17). He has also requested Shrestha to revise the plan of importing the COVID-19 vaccines till Falgun (March 14, 2022) and start the procurement processes immediately.²³

Newly appointed Vice-Chairperson of the National Planning Commission Bishwo Nath Poudel has said he will pay attention to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic along with floods and landslides.²⁴

The cases of suicide have increased in Nepal after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It increased by 14 per cent in the fiscal year 077/078 (BS) as compared to the previous year. Loss in business and extreme hopelessness are the reasons behind the increase in suicide rate, as per the police officials.²⁵

The cases of rape and murder increased in Nepal during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. According to Nepal Police data, despite a decline in the overall crime rate, there was an increase in serious crimes like murder, rape and drug-related crimes.²⁶

²⁰ Ratopati

²¹ Nayapatrika

²² Onlinekhabar

²³ Onlinekhabar

²⁴ Onlinekhabar

²⁵ Baarhakhari

The Education and Health Committee of the House of Representatives has advised government authorities to inoculate Grade 12 students who are sitting for the board examination from August 15 onwards with the COVID-19 vaccines. Committee Chairperson Jayapuri Gharti directed the government to maintain all health and safety guidelines and demanded the presence of doctors, nurses and necessary medicines at the examination centers. Infected students who are not able to join the examination should be given a chance to attend it in the second phase, Gharti said.²⁷

The COVID-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC) has held discussions with stakeholders regarding the operation of schools and universities. During the discussion, the stakeholders advised CCMC not to make the centralized decisions, and to give permission to reopen schools in the local levels that have low risk of COVID-19 infection and have a lesser number of students.²⁸

The exams of Class 11 have been cancelled in Palpa as the teachers there have not been inoculated with the COVID-19 vaccine. The Joint Teachers Struggle Committee of Palpa decided to stop all educational activities in the district from July 29 until the teachers are given the COVID-19 vaccine.²⁹

Nepalis returning home from India are being tested at the Jamunaha border checkpost of Banke. There is a crowd of people returning from India and going to Rupaidiha to shop at this border checkpost.³⁰

The Women and Social Committee under the House of Representatives has instructed the government to manage the physical infrastructure of the health sector and arrange vaccines keeping in mind the third wave of COVID-19 pandemic. It instructed the government to learn from the first and second waves and start preparations to protect the citizens from a possible third wave.³¹

²⁶ Nayapatrika

²⁷ The Himalayan Times

²⁸ Onlinekhabar

²⁹ Onlinekhabar

³⁰ Ratopati

³¹ Onlinekhabar

In a telephonic conversation with the US Secretary of state Antony J Blinken, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba expressed appreciation to the US government for providing assistance of 1.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines and sought further assistance of appropriate vaccines to cover children and the younger population for the prevention of a widely speculated third wave of the pandemic.³²

The government of Hungary has provided healthcare materials needed for the treatment of COVID-19 to Nepal.³³

Unfazed by the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant restrictions on movement which strangled foreign trade across the world, Nepal continued to splurge its ever-increasing remittance inflow on imports, and even achieved new highs in spending, especially on farm products. In the last fiscal year 2020-21 (ended July 15), Nepal added a 30 per cent year-on-year jump to its agricultural goods import bill, taking it to a staggering Rs 325 billion.³⁴

International News

COVAX is expecting to receive 250 million donated COVID-19 vaccine doses over the next six to eight weeks, the World Health Organization said on July 28. Under COVAX, the 92 poorest countries can access jabs for free with donors covering the cost.³⁵

Thai volunteers on July 28 turned a cargo warehouse at Bangkok's Don Mueang Airport into an 1,800-bed field hospital for COVID-19 patients with less severe symptoms, as the country deals with its biggest outbreak to date. "This is a level 1+ hospital where it can receive a large number of patients, who have less severe symptoms," said Rienthong Nanna, Director of Mongkutwattana Hospital. "But if patients' conditions deteriorate, they will be moved to our other field hospital." ³⁶

³² The Himalayan Times

³³ Baarhakhari

³⁴ The Kathmandu Post

³⁵ Agence France Presse (in The Kathmandu Post)

³⁶ Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

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