Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal
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- Sharpening the COVID-19 Response through Communications Intelligence

Date: July 28, 2021
Kathmandu, Nepal

EMERGING THEME(S)

- COVID-19 variant other than Alpha and Delta variants confirmed in Nepal: Health Ministry
- Nepal reported 2,726 new COVID-19 cases, 20 deaths on July 27, highest number of cases reported since June 10; Itahari Sub-Metropolitan City suspends all except essential services from July 27 to August 2 as increasing number of its staff test positive for COVID-19; Jhapa’s Mechinagar sealed for a week from July 28; as government tries to contain COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of viral fever cases reported from Lumbini Province, Rautahat, Tansen Kapilvastu; 3 districts of Kalikot, Okhaldhunga, Myagdi report cases of kala-azar, dengue, scrub typhus
- Government to buy 6,000,000 doses of Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine for those between the ages of 12 to 18 years, will take 6 to 9 months for the shots to arrive: Health Secretary
- Government to administer Janssen and Vero Cell vaccines to outbound migrant laborers according to their date of departure; Dhangadi starts online registration process of names for COVID-19 vaccination drive; uncontrollable crowds at Biratnagar’s immunization center; Nepalis can now get COVID-19 vaccination in India on production of (Nepali) citizenship or other official identity card
- Nagdhunga-Sisne Khola tunnel project remains unaffected by ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, prohibitory orders or monsoons as health safety protocols have been strictly followed

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.
Another variant of COVID-19 other than Alpha and Delta variants have been confirmed in Nepal, according to a press release issued by the Ministry of Health and Population. The newly found variant is infectious and can affect people of all age groups, studies have shown.2

Nepal's coronavirus caseload reached 685,673 on July 27 with 2,726 more people testing positive for the infection in the past 24 hours. This is the highest reported number of single-day cases since June 10 where 2,874 infections had surfaced. The countrywide COVID-19 mortality toll increased to 9,758 with 20 more fatalities. Nepal's COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 94.4 per cent and the fatality rate at 1.5 per cent. The country's active COVID-19 case count currently is 28,836.3

The Itahari Sub-Metropolitan City has shut down all services, except for essential services, for a week due to an increasing number of its staff getting infected with COVID-19. The services have been halted from July 27 to August 2.4

The Mechinagar Municipality of Jhapa will be sealed for a week from July 28 to control the COVID-19 pandemic.5

The local levels of Baglung have started to introduce stringent measures as the COVID-19 infection has been increasing with the relaxation of the prohibitory orders. Kushmishera market of Jaimini Municipality and Bhakunde of Baglung Municipality-10 have suspended all services except for essential services for a week.6

Public health expert Sharad Wanta said all sectors have been mobile with the relaxation of the prohibitory orders while health protocols have not been followed strictly which is the major reason for the increase in the COVID-19 infections in the country at present. The sources of infection are active and mobile in the community and the infection is spreading from them, he said.7

Hospitals in Lumbini Province have been reporting an increase in the number of patients suffering from viral fever in the

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2 Baarhakhari
3 THT Online
4 Nagarik
5 Setopati
6 Onlinekhabar
7 Setopati
Last week. According to Dr Sudarshan Thapa, a consultant physician at the Lumbini Provincial Hospital, around 50 patients suffering from viral fever have been visiting the hospital on a daily basis for the past few days. “There is a steady increase in the number of coronavirus patients too. Now the hospital is also getting overwhelmed with patients of viral fever,” he said. Given the ongoing situation, Thapa advises patients of viral infection to undergo a PCR test to rule out coronavirus infection since both illnesses have similar symptoms. Other hospitals that are seeing a rise in viral fever cases are Bhairahawa-based Bhim Hospital, the District Hospital in Taulihawa, Kapilvastu, health unit in Tansen Municipality, and Rampur Hospital in Palpa, among others.8

The number of fever patients has been increasing in the Lumbini Provincial Hospital in the last few days according to Dr Sudharshan Thapa, Senior Physician Consultant of the Hospital. Everyday more than 50 patients of viral fever are visiting the hospital and the number of COVID-19 patients has also been increasing. He stated that people need to maintain caution as all the symptoms of viral fever and COVID-19 infection are similar except for the loss of taste and smell. The case of Kapilvastu is similar — people suffering from fever and common cold have been visiting hospitals all panicked. Around 60 patients complaining of fever are visiting the district hospital in Taulihawa. The number of people visiting Rapti Provincial Hospital in Tulsiapur and Rampur Hospital with complaints of fever is also increasing.9

Viral fever patients have been increasing in Rautahat. As many as 150 viral fever cases and typhoid patients have reached the health facilities in Gaur Hospital daily for some days.10

At a time when the entire focus of the health authorities is on containing the COVID-19 pandemic, cases of kala-azar, dengue and scrub typhus have been reported in at least three districts — Kalikot, Okhaldhunga and Myagdi.11

The government is preparing to buy 6,000,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine for nearly 5,000,000 population between the ages 12 to 18. It has reached an agreement with Pfizer to buy 6,000,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, according to Health Secretary Laxman Aryal. Another 4,000,000 doses for the teenage population will be brought in coordination with the COVAX program, as per Aryal. It will take six to nine months to bring the vaccine.12

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8 The Kathmandu Post
9 Kantipur
10 The Himalayan Times
11 The Kathmandu Post
12 Kantipur
VACCINES & VACCINATION DRIVE

The government has decided that the migrant workers will be inoculated with either the single-shot Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen vaccine or Sinopharm’s double-shot Vero Cell vaccine, which has to be taken in a gap of three to four weeks, depending on their departure plan. “The government has decided to give Janssen vaccine to migrant workers who have to fly within a month while others will be given Sinopharm’s Vero Cell,” said Krishna Prasad Dawadi, Director-General with the Department of Foreign Employment.13

Dhangadi Sub-Metropolitan City has started online name registration to manage the COVID-19 vaccination drive. According to Dhangadi Mayor Nripa Bahadur Wada, volunteers have been mobilized in all 19 wards of the city to register names. “Some 40 volunteers have been mobilized to visit people at their homes to register the names of 18-plus year olds so that the vaccination drive can be better managed, and people don’t have to miss out on vaccines,” said Mayor Wada.14

The crowds of people have become uncontrollable at the immunization centers of Biratnagar with the beginning of the vaccination drive against COVID-19 there. Security personnel have been struggling to manage the crowd of people who have turned up to get the Vero Cell vaccine. In the drive that began on July 26, people are not maintaining social distancing, and this has increased the risk of infection.15

The vaccination against COVID-19 has begun in the 18 wards of Biratnagar Metropolitan City from July 27. People above the age of 55 are being inoculated with the Vero Cell vaccine.16

Nepalis residing in India will get the COVID-19 vaccine. All state governments have instructed the officials of the district government hospitals to provide the vaccine to Nepalis on the instructions of the central government. Nepalis can now get the vaccine after showing their citizenship or other official identity card(s).17

13 The Kathmandu Post
14 The Himalayan Times
15 Baarhakhari
16 Baarhakhari
17 Nagarik
The hotel and tourism entrepreneurs of Chitwan are in dilemma whether to resume their business that have been shut down following the prohibitory orders, or should they wait till they get the COVID-19 vaccine. Madhav Duwadi, Treasurer of the Regional Hotel Association of Nepal, Chitwan informed that the staff are unwilling to get back to work without getting the vaccine. If about 33 per cent of our workers could be inoculated, they could be back on work without worries, he said.18

The Nagdhunga-Sisne Khol tunnel project has not been affected by the prohibitory orders imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the monsoon. That was possible because of the following of health protocols and arrangement of basic materials needed for the construction. According to Naresh Man Shakya, Project Director, they would check the temperature of the laborers every day while the use of masks and sanitizers was mandatory while doing the work. They also allocated 10 isolation rooms that could accommodate 32 people, arranged oxygen cylinders, while a nurse was available 24 hours.19

OTHER(S)

National News

Finance Minister Janardan Sharma expressed his expectations with US ambassador Randy Berry for more help and facilitation from the USA regarding arrangement of COVID-19 vaccine for Nepal. Ambassador Berry stated that his country is positive about providing more help in the future if needed.20

The Ministry of Health and Population has said a pregnant woman infected with COVID-19 should stay isolated from other

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18 Kantipur
19 Kantipur
20 Ratopati
members of family, use a separate bathroom, and check her temperature frequently. It also suggested their oxygen level be checked and consult healthcare workers before taking any medicine.21

An oxygen plant was installed at the Koshi Hospital of Biratnagar on July 27 with the support of Rs 10,700,000 provided by the America Nepal Medical Foundation. The plant can produce 100 cylinders of oxygen per day.22

### International News

Thailand reported a record number of coronavirus infections on July 26, while neighboring Malaysia has more than a million, as the virulent Delta variant carves a deadly path through Southeast Asia, now a global epicenter for the virus. Thailand’s 15,376 new cases were a daily high for a second consecutive day in the nation of more than 66 million. Malaysia passed the one-million mark of infection on July 25 with a record 17,045 infections, despite being under lockdown since June.23

China reported 76 new coronavirus cases on July 26, the highest daily rise since January, including 40 domestic transmissions prompting authorities to test millions in eastern Jiangsu province. Beijing has a zero-risk approach to the virus, which emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019. It locks down cities and performs mass testing whenever small clusters appear.24

Life has been tentatively returning to normal in India as new coronavirus cases have fallen, but millions are embroiled in a nightmare of huge piles of medical bills. Most Indians don’t have health insurance and costs for COVID-19 treatment have them drowning in debt. The pandemic has devastated India’s economy, bringing financial calamity to millions at the mercy of its chronically underfunded and fragmented healthcare system. Experts say such costs are bound to hinder an economic recovery.25

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21 Baarhakhari  
22 Ratopati  
23 Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)  
24 Agence France Presse (in The Himalayan Times)  
India will miss a target to administer over a half billion COVID-19 vaccine doses by the end of the month as Bharat Biotech struggles to boost output, an analysis of the government showed on July 26. India has so far distributed 430 million doses.26

France’s parliament approved a law early on July 26 requiring special virus passes for all restaurants and domestic travel and mandating vaccinations for all health workers.27

From surgical masks and gloves to disposable hospital gowns and aprons, COVID-19 pandemic is creating a mountain of plastic and medical waste that is polluting land and sea — alarming doctors and environmentalists alike. One young entrepreneur in Mexico Tamara Chayo has now invented a range of reusable PPE she hopes will stop tons of single-use medical wear ending up in landfill, incinerators and waterways and save hospitals and fortune. Chayo says a doctor can used four disposable gowns a day whereas her PPE can be worn all day and washed 50 times without losing its protective properties — meaning each garment saves 200 plastic items from landfills and incinerators.28

26 The Kathmandu Post
28 Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)
Contacts for further details

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