



Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal



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-Sharpening the COVID-19 Response through Communications Intelligence

Date: September 15, 2021
Kathmandu, Nepal

EMERGING THEME(S)

- Nepal reported 1,180 new COVID-19 infections, 19 deaths on September 14; decline in new COVID-19 infections is due to decrease in tests being done, point out health experts warning infection risk is still there as it has not been controlled at expected rate; COVID-19 wards in Chitwan hospitals are emptying out due to decline in new infections
- Nepal Health Research Council to carry out safety and efficacy study of COVID-19 vaccines being used in the country

RECURRING THEME(S)

- Clinical trials for 2 COVID-19 vaccines developed by Chinese, and French and British multinationals to begin next week
- Schools in Nepal have started reopening for in-person classes though parents are still apprehensive; Consortium Nepal study has shown capacity development of children in Nepal has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, has also pointed out government is not serious about children regarding COVID-19 infection; Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has said government is making all efforts to provide children with the COVID-19 vaccine

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 779,492 on September 14 with 1,180 more people testing positive for the infection in the past 24 hours, while the countrywide COVID-19 mortality toll increased to 10,984 with 19 more fatalities. Nepal's COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 95.2 per cent, the fatality rate at 1.5 per cent, while the country's active COVID-19 case count currently is 26,202.²

Despite the data showing that the COVID-19 infection is decreasing in Nepal, health experts have said the risk from the pandemic is still there. The infection seems to have declined due to the decrease in the number of tests, they have pointed out. Public health expert Sharad Wanta said that despite the data showing a decline, the infection has not been controlled at the expected rate, the main reason being people not following the health safety protocols. We are still at risk as the infection rate has not gone below five per cent, he said.³

The COVID-19 wards in the hospitals of Chitwan have started becoming empty with the decline in the cases of COVID-19 infection in the district. In the 717 beds of the hospitals and local level isolation centers, only 51 COVID-19 infected patients are admitted as of September 13.⁴

Nepal Health Research Council is preparing to carry out a safety and efficacy study of the COVID-19 vaccines being used in the country. Nepal has not yet conducted a safety and efficacy study of the vaccines that are being administered to its citizens. "We had planned to carry out this study long ago, but due to change in the government and budget, we could not start earlier," said Dr Pradip Gyanwali, Member Secretary of the Council. "We now plan to start the study at the earliest." Experts say that the safety and efficacy study is different from the seroprevalence study and tell whether or not the vaccines have been working and how effectively.⁵

Two COVID-19 vaccine candidates developed by Chinese, and French and British multinational companies have received permission from the government for conducting clinical trials in Nepal. Officials said a messenger RNA (mRNA) COVID-19

² THT Online

³ Kantipur

⁴ Onlinekhabar

⁵ The Kathmandu Post

vaccine jointly developed by China's Suzhou Abogen Biosciences, the Institute of Military Medicine under the Academy of Military Sciences and Walvax Biotechnology Co Ltd, and another developed by Sonafi, a French multinational company in partnership with GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), a British company, have received the final approval from the Department of Drug Administration and the Nepal Health Research Council. Namita Ghimire, a member of the ethical board at the Council, said that the companies are likely to start the trials this week.⁶

The children in Nepal have started going to schools as the physical classes have resumed. However, parents are not free of worries regarding their protection from the COVID-19 infection due to the different policies and decisions adopted by the central and local governments. More than 54,000 children in Nepal have been infected by the coronavirus as of now. According to Dr Samir Kumar Adhikari, Joint Spokesperson at the Ministry of Health and Population, children do not follow the public health protocols. Dr Ganesh Kumar Rai, President of Nepal Pediatric Society, said children will be the most-affected in the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷

The Lalitpur Metropolitan City has decided to hand over the responsibility of physical reopening of schools from September 17 in the area to the schools themselves.⁸

A study has shown that the capacity development of children has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal. According to the report of Consortium Nepal, the lockdown and prohibitory orders due to the pandemic affected their learning process. Likewise, 200 children lost their both parents due to the infection, and 1,200 lost one of the parents.⁹

The study has also concluded that the government is not serious about children regarding the COVID-19 infection. The isolation and quarantine centers made during the pandemic are not child-friendly, it pointed out.¹⁰

The government has been making efforts to provide children with a vaccine against COVID-19, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur

⁶ The Kathmandu Post

⁷ Annapurna Post

⁸ Onlinekhabar

⁹ Onlinekhabar

¹⁰ Baarhakhari

Deuba has said. Wishing the children and guardians on the occasion of the 57th Children's Day, he said at least 20 per cent beds have been allocated for children infected with COVID-19 in every hospital.¹¹

OTHER(S)

National News

The government aims to inoculate 33 per cent of the target population against COVID-19 by Dashain.¹²

The Province 2 government has started the 'No Mask No Service' campaign with an aim to control and contain the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Chief Minister and other ministers of the Province appeared in public programs without masks a day after the announcement of the campaign.¹³

Doctors and healthcare workers at the BP Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital of Chitwan have not got their COVID-19 allowance. The hospital started the COVID-19 ward from Baisakh (April-May) but they have not got the risk allowance even now.¹⁴

Tourism entrepreneurs in Pokhara have demanded that the touristic destinations in the area that are still closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic be reopened. The shutting down of the destinations of tourist attractions has led to tourists not visiting the place, they have said.¹⁵

¹¹ Baarhakhari

¹² Nayapatrika

¹³ Ratopati

¹⁴ Onlinekhabar

The elephants used for jungle safari in Chitwan are being sold to India with the slowdown of the tourism sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶

The museums of Kathmandu that had been shut down due to COVID-19 infection some four months ago have started to reopen.¹⁷

A total of 35 cinema halls have closed across the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic as of now.¹⁸

The Halesi Temple of Khotang, shut down four months ago due to COVID-19 pandemic, has been reopened to the public.¹⁹

International News

India is worried that growing complacency as COVID-19 infection rates and deaths decline could lead to people skipping their second vaccine shots, leaving communities vulnerable to the coronavirus, said two health experts briefed on the matter. “There is a concern among the highest quarters of an impending vaccine hesitancy, in view of most taking a single dose already and disease incidence at its lowest,” said one of the sources. Large numbers of people skipping their second dose would be particularly problematic in areas with low numbers of previously infected people, meaning more people with fewer antibodies, so those communities would be more vulnerable, the first expert said.²⁰

The rapid pace of new COVID-19 infections and a doubling of seriously ill patients in Singapore have raised unexpected hurdles to reopening plans for the vaccination frontrunner, where 81 per cent of the population is fully vaccinated. Singapore has seen its inoculation rates plateau, and this month paused its gradual reopening plans, spooked by daily infections that returned to one-year peaks this month. Many experts are not overly concerned about the rise in infections

¹⁵ Nagarik

¹⁶ Kantipur

¹⁷ Setopati

¹⁸ Baahrakhari

¹⁹ Onlinekhabar

²⁰ Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

because of the low number of serious cases and Singapore's high vaccination percentage. The number of patients requiring oxygen however doubled to a record 54 on September 12 from two days before, an important gauge to judge whether the medical system could get overwhelmed.²¹

Britain is set to expand the offer of a COVID-19 vaccine to all 12- to 15-year-olds, after top medical advisers said on September 13 that children would benefit from reduced disruption of their education. The Chief Medical Officers recommended that children aged 12-15 in Britain get a first shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.²²

The Biden administration is making \$482 million available to aviation industry manufacturers to help them avert job or pay cuts in the pandemic. The taxpayer-funded relief will cover up to half of the payroll costs at 313 companies, according to the Transportation Department which will help save up to 22,500 jobs.²³

²¹ Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

²² Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

²³ The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

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