



Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal



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-Sharpening the COVID-19 Response through Communications Intelligence

Date: September 20, 2021

Kathmandu, Nepal

EMERGING THEME(S)

- Nepal reported 656 new COVID-19 cases, 12 deaths on September 19; Delta variant of COVID-19 confirmed in 97 out of 99 samples collected from Nepal since July for gene sequencing; viral fever seen in children below 5 years of age in Dailekh
- PM Sher Bahadur Deuba says Nepal will vaccinate one-third of its population against COVID-19 by October 17, and everyone eligible by April 13 next year; government has procured 4 million doses of Moderna vaccine to inoculate those below the age of 18 years; immunocompromised might be given the soon-to-arrive Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine; morale of the state and citizens up as COVID-19 vaccine accessibility has become easier; Nepalis going abroad facing problems as not all World Health Organization-approved COVID-19 vaccines are approved by all countries; vaccination with 4.4 million doses of Vero Cell brought on September 17 to begin countrywide from September 20
- Cases of malnutrition on the rise after the onset of COVID-19 pandemic as health authorities have shifted their entire focus to battling coronavirus

RECURRING THEME(S)

- With COVID-19 Crisis Management Ordinance 2078 BS becoming defunct, COVID-19 Crisis Management Center no longer exists putting country's COVID-19 response in limbo

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 784,566 on September 19 with 656 more people testing positive for the infection in the past 24 hours, while the countrywide COVID-19 mortality toll increased to 11,040 with 12 more fatalities. Nepal's COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 95.5 per cent, the fatality rate at 1.5 per cent, while the active COVID-19 case count currently is 24,313.²

The Delta variant was confirmed in 97 out of 99 samples collected for gene sequencing since July in Nepal. Meanwhile, a Wild-type variant was found in two samples. The Delta Plus, Delta and Alpha variants have been confirmed as variants of concern in Nepal, while Kappa has been confirmed as a variant of interest. The South African, Brazilian and Colombian variants have not yet been found in Nepal, but a new variant might develop within the country, said Dr Krishna Prasad Paudel, Spokesperson at the Ministry of Health and Population. The experts have also pointed out that the risk of new variants entering the country is still present due to the carelessness at the border checkpoints.³

Viral fever has been seen in children below the age of five in different places of Dailekh. The Dailekh Health Office has been filled with children suffering from common cold, fever and pneumonia. The COVID-19 test has come back negative in samples taken from these children.⁴

The PCR laboratory run by the Byas Municipality of Tanahun has received approval from the Provincial Public Health Laboratory. Swab of 96 samples can be tested at one time at the laboratory and the result comes out in two-and-a-half hours.⁵

Banke district, which had been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, has been returning to normal with the relaxation of the lockdown by the District Administration Office. The factories, industries, businesses, along with the schools have reopened here. People have also started stepping out of their houses.⁶

The local level has brought a health desk into operation on the Manakamana Temple premises in view of the risks of COVID-

² THT Online

³ Kantipur

⁴ Nayapatrika

⁵ Ratopati

⁶ Nagarik

19. According to Chief of Health Section at Shahid Lakhan Rural Municipality Birendra Shrestha, since the temple priests and security personnel come in touch with devotees arriving at this shrine, all of them are at risk of the contagion; hence, they have been regularly conducting health check of the priests, security personnel and temple staff. Similarly, health check-up is also carried out if any devotee faces health issues.⁷

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said one-third of the population will get the COVID-19 vaccines in Nepal by Asoj (October 17), while all eligible citizens will be inoculated by coming Chaitra (April 13). The vaccines will be provided free of cost, he said during a program organized to mark the Constitution Day on September 19.⁸

The government has procured 4,000,000 doses of Moderna vaccine to inoculate children below the age of 18. Nepal has already sent the payment for the vaccine to Moderna company, but it is not known when the vaccine will be sent to Nepal, as per Dr Sagar Dahal, Chief of the Immunization Division under the Department of Health Services.⁹

With Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine all set to arrive in Nepal, authorities are mulling over giving the jabs to people with their immunity compromised. These include patients of cancer, renal failure and heart disease, among others, officials at the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) said. “Due to limited doses of the vaccine offered to us by the COVAX facility, we are thinking of administering them to those taking immunosuppressants or those who are immunocompromised,” an official at MoHP said. “We think that the vaccine will be sufficient only for the said group.”¹⁰

The Ministry of Health and Population has proceeded with agreement for the procurement of 4,000,000 doses of vaccine each from Pfizer and Moderna to inoculate children aged 12 to 18. According to Sagar Dahal, Chief of the Immunization Division, an agreement to buy 4,000,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine, while an agreement for another 4,000,000 doses of Moderna vaccine via the COVAX program has been made.¹¹

⁷ Rastriya Samachar Samiti (in The Himalayan Times)

⁸ Baarhakhari

⁹ Setopati

¹⁰ The Kathmandu Post

¹¹ Nayapatrika

The COVID-19 vaccines — Vero Cell of China, Covishield of India, Johnson & Johnson of USA, and AstraZeneca of Japan — are being used in Nepal. However, there has been a problem for Nepalis visiting abroad due to the use of different vaccines as not all the World Health Organization-approved vaccines have been approved by different countries.¹²

The morale of the state and Nepali citizens regarding the battle against COVID-19 has increased due to the accessibility of the vaccine. A total of 5,507,380 people have got the complete doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.¹³

The doses of Vero Cell vaccine — 4,400,000 — procured from China arrived in Nepal on September 17. The vaccine will be given to all above the age of 18 from 10 Himalayan districts of the country.¹⁴

The 4,400,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine that Nepal is receiving from China on September 17 will be administered from September 20.¹⁵

The second shot of Vero Cell vaccine is being administered from September 20 from 145 vaccination centers by the District Health Office, Kathmandu.¹⁶

The government is set to provide the first dose of Vero Cell vaccine from September 20 to 30 from different parts of the country. The age groups eligible to get the vaccines have been set as per the places.¹⁷

Only 15 cases of malnutrition had been reported in 2019 and 2020 in Darchula district, but in the last two months, 800 cases of malnutrition have been reported in the district. Amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, problems of malnutrition have been emerging as a major health issue, healthcare workers say. And what is concerning is that the parents of the malnourished children are unaware of the problems while the health authorities have shifted their entire focus to the coronavirus.¹⁸

All legal frameworks related to the country's COVID-19 response, including the COVID-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC),

¹² Nayapatrika

¹³ Nayapatrika

¹⁴ Kantipur

¹⁵ Nayapatrika

¹⁶ Rastriya Samachar Samiti (in The Himalayan Times)

¹⁷ Baarhakhari

¹⁸ The Kathmandu Post

no longer exist now, which experts and officials say could make it difficult with the coronavirus crisis. With the annulment of the COVID-19 Crisis Management Ordinance 2078 BS, the CCMC, an agency created to respond to the pandemic, has become defunct from September 15 midnight. As the ordinance has no effect now, Provincial COVID-19 Crisis Management centers and District COVID-19 Crisis Management Centers of all 77 districts also have become defunct.¹⁹

OTHER(S)

National News

REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

The Kathmandu District Administration Office has restricted educational institutions from conducting in-person teaching-learning activities citing the risk of COVID-19. Issuing an order on September 16, the local administration said the restriction would be effective from September 17 until further notice.²⁰

Despite strong reservations by educationists and guardians against government plans to reopen schools from September 17, the District Administration Office Kathmandu on September 15 published a notice conditionally allowing educational institutions to resume physical classes. Stakeholders have criticized the notice as evasive and self-contradictory. “The notice is contradictory and unclear,” said Suprabhat Bhandari, Chairperson of the Guardians Federation Nepal. “First it says schools can’t reopen, then says they can.” He said there is no point in reopening schools and exposing the children to COVID-19 risk now as the month-long Dashain and Tihar festival vacations are just three weeks away. Ram Prasad Subedi, Chief of Kathmandu Metropolitan City’s Education Department said the City is under immense pressure from private school operators’ organizations — Pabson and N-Pabson — and even some parents from public schools to reopen schools.²¹

¹⁹ The Kathmandu Post

²⁰ The Himalayan Times

²¹ The Kathmandu Post

The Tribhuvan University has requested its affiliate and constituent colleges to arrange for resuming in-person classes from September 17.²²

The Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City has decided to reopen schools in the area only after the festival of Tihar.²³

The government has named healthcare workers deployed in the frontline to control the COVID-19 pandemic for the different accolades given on the occasion of the Constitution Day on September 19. It has decided to honor 110 doctors and healthcare workers.²⁴

The Indra Jatra festival is being celebrated traditionally amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Kathmandu on September 19.²⁵

The hotel and tourism business is at risk in Birgunj as the border checkpost has not been reopened completely to control the COVID-19 pandemic, according to businessmen here. The vehicles carrying goods and pedestrians are allowed to enter from the checkpost, while entry of small and big public vehicles and private vehicles from India is still banned.²⁶

The complaints of people not getting the compensation for COVID-19 insurance claims are increasing at different governmental bodies like Hello Sarkar, Ministry of Finance, Insurance Board, among others. More than two dozen complaints are being registered just at Hello Sarkar every day.²⁷

Nepalis going abroad and returning have been facing plenty of problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nepali citizens can return home only after filling up the form of COVID-19 Crisis Management Center in foreign nations. The negative report of the PCR test done within 72 hours is mandatory. However, the passengers face hassles immediately after disembarking at the

²² Nayapatrika

²³ Nagarik

²⁴ Nayapatrika

²⁵ Setopati

²⁶ Annapurna Post

²⁷ Kantipur

airport. It is worse for those going abroad who are forced to spend the salary of one to two months on quarantine and arranging documents online.²⁸

Tourism professionals have demanded that the government immediately address their concerns and demands, failing which they will take to the streets from next week. The tourism professionals are demanding that the government provide on-arrival visa to fully vaccinated tourist and waive quarantine requirement for such visitors. They have also asked for immediate opening of border with India and prompt implementation of free one-month visa provision for tourists as announced by the government. The tourism professionals have also said that instead of the COVID-19 Crisis Management Center, the Chief District Officers should be given the authority to ensure necessary health safety protocols are being followed in their respective districts.²⁹

In order to combat the COVID-19 crisis in Nepal, the French government and IDEMIA, a global leader in Augmented Identity, have joined hand to send to Nepal spare parts for oxygen plants built by a French company, NOVAIR. “The French government and IDEMIA have jointly sponsored spare parts for oxygen plants worth 48,000 Euros built by NOVAIR to eight hospitals so that they would be able to ensure continuous function of these life-saving machines,” said French Ambassador to Nepal Francois-Xavier Leger during a handover ceremony on September 16.³⁰

Save the Children, Central and Sudurpashchim Field Office handed over health materials worth over Rs 10 million to Karnali Province government in Surkhet on September 17 to control COVID-19 infection.³¹

International News

The inequality seen in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines has been a major agenda of discussion at the 76th General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in New York. Ten developed countries of the world have been consuming

²⁸ Nayapatrika

²⁹ The Himalayan Times

³⁰ Rastriya Samachar Samiti (in The Himalayan Times)

³¹ The Himalayan Times

80 per cent of the vaccines. In such a scenario, the question has been raised about the role of UN that has 193 countries as its member countries.³²

The head of the world's largest vaccine maker said on September 17 it was "unethical" to give third doses of the COVID-19 vaccine while developing nations are struggling to access first and second jabs. Adar Poonawalla, billionaire chief executive of Serum Institute of India, spoke out as he announced a \$4.9 billion deal to take a 15 per cent stake in a rival pharma firm, allowing vaccine production to be ramped up. He said it was "not right" to roll out booster shots when poorer countries have "not been able to get the vaccines purely because the rich nations have taken away most of the vaccines".³³

Hospitals, care homes and health centers have suspended around 3,000 workers across France for failing to comply with mandatory COVID-19 vaccination, the government said on September 16 as countries around Europe weigh how far to go to combat the pandemic.³⁴

Several Asian nations are quickly ramping up vaccination campaigns from shaky starts to combat growing COVID-19 infections as supply shipments roll in and people overcome hesitancy in hopes of easing curbs and freeing up travel. Japan and South Korea have passed the United States in terms of those who have received at least one dose and are fast catching up with the second. Australia has given 56 per cent of people at least one shot. Asia's momentum reflects pent-up demand for the shots as a means to ease lockdowns, said Paul Griffin, an infectious disease expert at the University of Queensland.³⁵

India broke its daily COVID-19 vaccination on September 17 by administering over 20 million doses of vaccines in a single day as states organized a special inoculation drive on the occasion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's birthday.³⁶

The capital of the United Arab Emirates has ended a policy requiring those coming in from other emirates to have a recent negative coronavirus test. Abu Dhabi made the announcement on September 18 saying that people from UAE's six other emirates could enter the capital from September 19 without getting a test.³⁷

³² Kantipur

³³ Agence France Presse (in The Kathmandu Post)

³⁴ Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

³⁵ Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

³⁶ Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

³⁷ The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

The government of the UK has announced that it is scrapping its ‘traffic light’ system that ranks countries as red, amber or green — high, medium or low risk — from the coronavirus. The categories have been criticized as unfair and sudden changes to countries’ status have caused headaches for thousands of travelers. From October 4, there will be a two-tier system.³⁸

A pandemic-induced economic shock and closing of schools for more than a year has been a devastating blow for many of Indonesia’s 68 million students, according to experts. “Indonesia had a major learning crisis prior to the pandemic, and our model indicates that it has gotten much worse,” Noah Yarrow, an education specialist at the World Bank and co-author of a report released on September 17 said. Highlighting Indonesia’s shift from bad education outcomes to dreadful ones, the World Bank report calculated the pandemic will leave more than 80 per cent of 15-year-olds below the minimum reading proficiency level identified by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.³⁹

The first plane carrying tourists in more than four months touched down on the Malaysian island of Langkawi on September 16 and was greeted by a twin water cannon ‘salute’ in the launch of a program to revive a travel sector frozen by the pandemic. The first batch of 159 travelers from the capital Kuala Lumpur arrived eager for a vacation after a monthlong nationwide lockdown imposed to address one of Asia’s highest per-capital coronavirus infection rates.⁴⁰

³⁸ The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

³⁹ Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

⁴⁰ Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

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