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ಶಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: Covid-19

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: The Hindu

ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE : 31/3/2024

Surge in cases a cause for concern: Centre

Pune, Bengaluru among 10 districts with high active caseload

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The surge in the number of COVID-19 cases has gone "from bad to worse", said V.K. Paul, member (health), NITI Aayog, as India registered 56,211 new infections in the 24 hours till 8 a.m. on Tuesday.

At a press conference, Dr. Paul said Pune (59,475), Mumbai (46,248), Nagpur (45,322), Thane (35,264), and Bengaluru Urban (16,259) were among the 10 districts across the country with the most number of active cases. He said, "We are facing an increasingly severe and intense situation, more so surely in some districts. But the whole country is potentially at risk and therefore all efforts to contain and save lives should be taken."

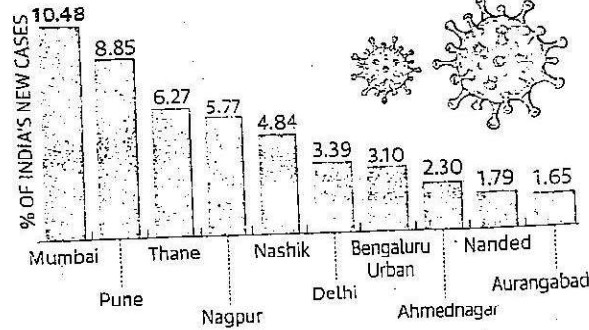
Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan stressed the need to take urgent action to curb the surge.

He said States had been asked to ramp up testing, with focus on RT-PCR tests.

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Unabated surge

Eight of the 10 districts reporting the highest share of new COVID-19 cases on Monday were in Maharashtra. Mumbai accounted for over 10% of the country's new cases



'Fine flyers flouting norms'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Tuesday instructed airports to increase surveillance to ensure compliance of COVID-19 protocols on their premises and to levy fines for violations.

"All airport operators are requested to ensure that the instructions on COVID-19

protocol from the standpoint of wearing face-masks properly, covering nose and mouth, as well as maintaining social distancing within the airport premises are followed scrupulously," the DGCA circular read. It asked airports to join hands with the local police and impose fines on passengers who flout COVID-19 norms.

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Surge in cases a cause for concern, says Centre

They have also been directed to ensure effective and prompt isolation of those infected and tracing their close contacts while strengthening the public and private healthcare resources.

"Ensuring COVID-appropriate behaviour and saturation of vaccination for priority age groups" in districts reporting a surge in cases was also a priority, he said.

The average national positivity rate stood at 5.65% last week, he added.

Mr. Bhushan said Maharashtra was showing a weekly average positivity rate of 23.4%, Punjab (8.82%), Chhattisgarh (8%), Madhya Pradesh (7.82%), Tamil Nadu (2.50%), Karnataka (2.45%), Gujarat (2.2%) and Delhi (2.04%). In a letter to the Chief Secretaries of all the States and the Union Territories, the Union Health Ministry said: "Many districts are seeing clusters of cases

emerging because of specific events, crowding coupled with lack of COVID-appropriate behaviour." It added that some districts which saw a high number of cases in August-November last year were again witnessing a high growth rate of cases. In addition, a number of districts that saw limited prevalence earlier, were also showing a surge in cases.

Mr. Bhushan said, as per a government survey, 97% people were satisfied with the overall vaccination experience. The Ministry had not received any specific request from the Maharashtra government to carry out door-to-door vaccination, he added.

Six States – Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat – reported 78.56% of the new cases reported on Tuesday, a statement from the Health Ministry said.