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Perspective



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Minimizing the risk of international spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak by targeting travelers

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Abstract

The Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has become a global health emergency owing to its magnitude, attributed deaths, and its propensity to spread across the world. In-fact, owing to its quick spread across international boundaries and the resulting caseload, the disease has been declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020. It is worth noting that out of the 395 cases detected in other nations, 165 (41.8%) have a positive history of travel to China. As of now, the World Health Organization has not recommended for any restrictions on the travel or trade aspects, but has clearly specified that implementation of International Health Regulations should be strictly done at the airports and seaports. In conclusion, the COVID-19 outbreak has created an alarm across the globe as the causative virus is novel in nature. However, strengthening of standard infection control practices and adoption of preventive measures for travelers can significantly minimize the threat of further transmission of the disease.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19 outbreak; Public health emergency of international concern; Travelers; World Health Organization

1. Introduction

The Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak due to SARS-CoV-2 has become a global health emergency owing to its magnitude, attributed deaths, and its propensity to spread across the world[1]. The available global estimates suggest that since the start of the outbreak in Wuhan city of China, till 11 February 2020, a total of 43 103 confirmed cases of the disease has been reported, of which 99.1% are from China alone[1]. The remaining 395

confirmed cases have been reported in the other 25 affected nations, among which Singapore and Thailand have accounted for the maximum number of cases in descending order[2]. In addition, a total of 1 018 deaths have also been attributed to the viral infection, of which except 1 death (from the Philippines), all of the remaining cases have been reported in China[1].

2. COVID-19: Public health emergency of international concern

In fact, owing to its quick spread across international boundaries and the resulting caseload, the disease has been declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020[3]. It can be stated that most nations lack preparedness to respond to the outbreak with regard to infrastructure support (laboratory facilities, isolation wards, logistics, *etc.*), risk communication, and surveillance mechanism[4]. This recommendation indicates that a lot needs to be done by each of the nations in terms of their preparedness to respond to the sudden emergence of the cases within their national boundaries[4].

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3. Travel and the risk of COVID outbreak

It is worth noting that out of the 395 cases detected in other nations, 165 (41.8%) have a positive history of travel to China[1]. As of now, the World Health Organization has not recommended any restrictions on the travel or trade aspects but has clearly specified that implementation of International Health Regulations should be strictly done at airports and seaports[4]. This should be carried out with an aim to detect cases at an early stage and isolating them to provide appropriate treatment but not with an intention to trouble routine travelers[4].

4. Prevention and control measures

The available epidemiological data suggest that the mode of transmission of the infection between humans is mostly through airborne droplets, contacts, and fomites[3,4]. Thus, all travelers are advised to avoid close contact with people who have already suffered from acute respiratory infections (ARI)[1]. At the same time, people who are having symptoms of ARI should strictly adhere to cough etiquettes, which essentially includes maintaining distance from others while coughing, covering mouth/nose while coughing or sneezing, and washing hands with soap and water after coughing[1].

Further more, travelers should avoid contact with farm or wild animals and always practice handwashing after coming in contact with ill people or their environment[1,4]. These protective measures are very much applicable to the general population as well. Finally, in case an individual presents with symptoms of ARI during or after travel, they should seek medical attention and definitely inform about their travel history to the health care professional[4]. It is worth noting that none of these measures advocated for stigma or discrimination against the affected individuals, but only with an intention to prevent the onward transmission of the disease[1].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the COVID-19 outbreak has created an alarm across the globe as the causative virus is novel in nature. However, strengthening standard infection control practices and the adoption of preventive measures for travelers can significantly minimize the threat of further transmission of the disease.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution

S.R.S. contributed in the conception or design of the work, drafting of the work, approval of the final version of the manuscript, and agreed for all aspects of the work; P.S.S. contributed in the literature review, revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content, approval of the final version of the manuscript, and agreed for all aspects of the work.

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