

## COVID 19 Care Call-in Helpline. A Report from India

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### Abstract

A COVID 19 call helpline was established by a noted TV channel along with a group of consultant doctors at the height of the second wave COVID 19 pandemic in India.. It helped the general public to understand dos and donts as well as long term implications. We retrospectively analysed the questions asked to get a feel of the misunderstandings and perceptions within the general public. Many queries related to the vaccination drive.

### Keywords:

COVID 19, Pandemic, Vaccine

### Introduction

Coronaviruses are a big family of viruses. Some of them affects humans while other affects animals such as bats, camels and cats[1]. The variant of coronavirus behind Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) pandemic known to cause pneumonia with multiorgan disease is severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It is believed that SARS-CoV-2 has originated from bats and it jumped from it to a human in one of the open-air wet markets of Wuhan, China. Later it started getting transmitted to humans having no direct contact with these animals indicating Human to Human Transmission [2]. As of May 15th 2021, 222 countries have been affected with a total number of 161,513,458 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 3,352,109 deaths [3].

The first case of COVID 19 was reported on 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020. As of 15<sup>th</sup> May 2021, India has the second-highest number of confirmed cases in the world with more than 24 Million reported cases of COVID-19 and 266,207 deaths. [3]

The Government of India as well as various organisations and individuals have been making continuous efforts to contain the disease and help the COVID 19 victims. One such joint effort by Aaj Tak News Channel and AIMS2Health Pvt Ltd was about providing Telemedicine consultations to COVID 19 victims. A helpline number was launched by Aaj Tak: call-in number 011-35216666 active from 14<sup>th</sup> May 2021 to 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021 from 1 – 5 PM. More are planned for subsequent weekends. We hereby present a report of distribution of callers and their general queries. At the time of submitting this paper only preliminary results have come in, but still, they make for interesting reading. We shall be able to compile the complete results and give fuller details during a formal revision. A decision was made on the 14<sup>th</sup> evening to try to get a more formal output of the questions asked.

### Objective

To understand the current problems and perceptions about the COVID 19 pandemic within the public.

### Methods

The helpline calls were only pertaining to COVID 19 and answered by 10 doctors appointed from AIMS2Health.

For research purposes the attending doctors were requested to note down additional parameters of the caller on a separate sheet of paper or an Excel® worksheet through simple clicks or Yes /No answers. These included - Date and Time of call, geographical location of the caller, whether urban or rural, current or past sufferance, and if so days since onset. If yes, hospitalised or stayed at home with current problems if any. Whether the inquiry was regarding vaccination and the specifics. The doctors enquired further as per need and offered preliminary advice. Miscellaneous issues were also noted.

### Preliminary Results

Additional to our own data the TV Channel promised to provide us with the database of total number of calls attended by the doctors and the total time spent. Unfortunately, as of now we have this data only for the first day. The total number of completed calls answered on May 14th between 1 – 5 PM were 1044 (Table 1). The total talk time was 20 Hours, 16 Minutes and 12 Seconds. The average time per call was 1 minute 46 seconds.

For May 15th and 16th more detailed data of some of the call contents was made available in Excel from 4 doctors. These were for a total of 324 answered calls. Most of the calls were from Delhi and other parts of North India (See map figure 1). There was equal distribution of calls from urban as well as rural areas. Urban callers were more interested in vaccination while rural inquiries related more to treatment and follow up of active disease,

Among those who had an episode of COVID 19 the current inquiry was done on an average of 18.4 days (range 5-45 days) after the onset of symptoms. Many had suffered despite being vaccinated. Among the sufferers 90% of people had undergone home based care. Active cases (i.e. < 7 days of onset) were mostly from rural areas.

### Discussion and Conclusions

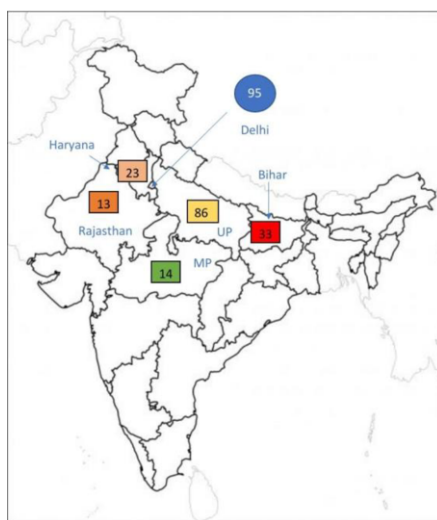
As per protocol, the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose of Covishield vaccine (Astra Zeneca®) was initially planned to be given after 28 days. This was changed to 6-8 weeks in mid April and then again around

this time to 12-16 weeks. This frequent change in dosage schedule was an issue. Another frequent query was the next dose timing among sufferers of active disease (Answer is 3 months) Around 10% of sufferers were worried about mucormycosis

A particular caller from a village in Uttar Pradesh painstakingly informed us that over 8 persons in his village had died in the last 15 days. This was against the average annual toll being one or two. Another caller from Himachal Pradesh asked about fever in a relative since last 4 days. He knew nothing about COVID 19.

India is currently facing a huge surge of COVID 19 cases which peaked (second wave) by the first week of May 2021. There were more questions regarding vaccine in urban areas and about the disease in rural areas. It seems that the peak is past in urban areas but rural areas are still getting fresh cases.

Figure 1 – Distribution of caller locations (From the data compiled by the doctors who noted the details)



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S No	Calls answered	Blank Calls	Total Calls	Avg Pickup Time	Avg Talk Time	total talk time
1	155	88	243	00:00:10	00:01:14	03:11:10
2	149	62	211	00:00:08	00:01:25	03:31:05
3	147	103	250	00:00:09	00:01:13	02:58:51
4	129	66	195	00:00:08	00:01:22	02:56:18
5	120	94	214	00:00:08	00:01:45	03:30:00
6	117	95	212	00:00:11	00:01:46	03:26:42
7	99	122	221	00:00:18	00:01:18	02:08:42
8	84	142	226	00:00:06	00:03:00	04:12:00
9	27	245	272	00:00:18	00:02:02	00:54:54
10	17	284	301	00:00:15	00:02:38	00:44:46
Totals	1044	1301	2345		00:17:43	20:16:12
Avg	104.4	130.1	234.5	00:00:11	00:01:46	02:45:27

Table 1 – total number of calls and their distribution as on May 14<sup>th</sup> (results of other days awaited)