

COVID-19: A PANDEMIC

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Coronavirus pandemic has caused a sudden halt to our world and created uncertainties almost unimaginable just a short time ago. Medical community all around the world faces its biggest challenge in modern history. This pandemic has created dramatic changes with profound impacts in everyone's lives. These are extraordinary times.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and has resulted in an ongoing pandemic. The first confirmed case has been traced back to 17 November 2019. It was named as 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 7 January 2020. According to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) situation report given by WHO (Data as reported on 27 June 2020), 9,633,157 cases were globally confirmed and 490,481 persons have died so far.¹ The source of infection of original cases was related to seafood wholesale market. Since there is similarity between the SARS-CoV-2 and Bat-CoV RaTG13 (a gene detected from a bat), researchers supposed that bat is an initial host. Following studies suggested pig or pangolin as a possible intermediate host but the exact source of spread is still unclear.² Respiratory droplets (related to human respiratory activities such as talking, coughing and sneezing) and direct contact are the most probable transmission routes, but some cases show other ways of transmission like; fecal-oral transmission, fomite transmission (transfer of a virus via an object), perinatal (intrauterine) transmission.³

The clinical manifestations of COVID-19, even though the symptoms are nonspecific are fever, nonproductive cough, myalgia, headache, dizziness, abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, loss of smell and taste etc.⁴ Dealing with the COVID-19 crisis is requiring rapid health system change on a scale rarely seen before. Establishing a helpful antiviral agent against COVID-19 is urgently needed. A number of drugs have been claimed to be safe and efficient by randomized controlled trials; however, only few of which have been allowed by FDA. Vaccines for COVID-19 has been under trial but none of them has completed all trial and came on market. Even at the earliest, it may require six months to one year for a vaccine to be available to general people. Just as important as

providing evidence for dealing with the here-and-now challenges of the pandemic will be producing learning from the crisis. Some of the changes introduced now may restructure healthcare forever.

The first case in Nepal was confirmed on 23 January 2020 when a 31-year-old student, who had returned to Kathmandu from Wuhan on 9 January 2020, tested positive for the disease.⁵ Between January and March 2020, Nepal took steps to prevent a widespread outbreak of the disease while preparing for it by procuring essential supplies, equipment and medicine, upgrading health infrastructure, training medical personnel, and spreading public awareness. The second case was confirmed on 23 March 2020 in Kathmandu. The first death occurred on 14 May 2020. A total of 12,309 cases have been confirmed as of 27 June 2020, affecting all 77 administrative districts; 2,834 of them have recovered, while 28 have died. Since late January, 210877 RT-PCR tests have been performed in 20 laboratories across the country, and 294034 rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) have been carried out.⁶ A country-wide lockdown came into effect on 24 March 2020, and ended on 14 June 2020. Quarantine centres and temporary hospitals are being set up across the country. Laboratory facilities are being upgraded and expanded. Medical personnel are at the forefront in the battle of COVID-19 pandemic and they are facing several challenges like shortage of protective equipment, long working hours, increased risk of infection for self and their family members and even violence against health workers. Nepal cancelled its international promotional activities related to Visit Nepal Year 2020. Its economy is expected to be severely affected by the pandemic due to its impact on foreign employment, tourism, manufacturing, construction and trade.

Everyone had been in lockdown for over two months. Many of us were bored, missed our daily routines, and frustrated about staying indoors all the time. The lockdown had some benefits as the water became clearer, air quality got better, people started eating at home, had quality time with family, started exercises but at the cost of economic downfall. Many people have lost their jobs, especially people who work on daily wages were hit hard. Lockdown had a toll on the mental health of people as well. Faced with new realities of working from home, temporary unemployment, home-schooling of

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children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues, it is important that we look after our mental health, as well. A total of 875 people have committed suicide during the lockdown period in Nepal. According to the data compiled by the Nepal Police, the suicide cases across the country increased by 20 percent in the first month of the lockdown.⁷

So, the way ahead is living with the virus till we find a cure. Wearing masks in public places, maintaining social distancing, washing hands frequently after touching any surface that may be contaminated, not touching face, going in public only when necessary should be practiced along with opening of essential services, working with utmost precaution and resuming economic activities. Coronavirus is spreading at a breakneck speed and it is important to put all necessary resources into halting it. We may not know about the virus impact but we do know that close monitoring and appropriate prevention are the key to fight against the virus.

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