

EDITORIAL

SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19 IN PAKISTAN; HOW WORSE IT CAN GET?

Maryam Rashid¹, Mariyam Piracha²

The outbreak of Corona Virus which was initiated as Pneumonia of unknown origin in December 2019 in Wuhan, China was declared by WHO as the sixth Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30th January 2020 and officially the name given to this illness was Corona Virus Disease-19 (COVID-19). The first case of coronavirus was reported in Karachi, Pakistan on 26th February 2020.

In the first wave of COVID-19, when the number of cases was rapidly increasing, the Government of Pakistan imposed a strict lockdown restraining the public transport, markets, hotels/restaurants, shopping malls, marriage halls, educational institutions, and recreational sports, etc. Then, due to severe threats to the national and individual economic status, the lockdown was modified to a “smart” lockdown to focus only on the “worst-hit: areas. In this way, Pakistan handled this Pandemic reasonably and this policy was very well endorsed by the international observers. The National Coordination Committee (NCC) declared the Pandemic under control in its meeting on 7th August 2020. On 5th September 2020, no new case of the corona was reported and the death rate was reduced to 3 per day only. However, that mislead people and they started their routine work all around the country.¹

Although the Government of Pakistan continued warning the people of Pakistan to continue observing the precautionary SOPs, but the people were so much relaxed that they started their routine activities, as usual, all over the country. The opening of shopping malls, hotels/restaurants, marriage halls, educational institutions, and recreational spots, etc. resulted to increase again in the number of corona cases every day.

¹Professor Pharmacology, AMDC, Lahore.

²Assistant Professor Pharmacology, AMDC, Lahore.

People started neglecting all the SOPs. Initially, the Government of Pakistan did not take any strict action considering again the economic status of the country but that policy failed to control the spread of the second wave of the corona. Slack and inefficient policy and lockdown gamble paved the way for Covid-19 spread through political, religious, social, regular business activities, tourism, and transport. Not just that, the colleges, schools, and universities were also re-opened for regular activities across the country.

Ease in lockdown, with the opening of shopping malls and all areas of public gatherings, resulted in havoc and increase in the cases every day, people also started attending weddings and gatherings and were barely following SOPs. The government and authorities were well aware of the situation but ignored the option of lockdown considering that it would ruin the country's economy and thus have failed to control the spread of pandemic due to non-implementation of strict rules and fines to the locals.²

Things got out of hand when the lockdown was uplifted which eventually led us to the second wave of the pandemic. It is highly foreseeable that Covid-19 can become a source of persistent infection if such non-serious attitude of the people and ignorance by authorities continues.³ With a spike in everyday cases, the government officially announced the second wave of Covid-19 in Pakistan on 24 October 2020 which resulted in > 3000 new cases, just like back in July when the first highest number of cases were reported. Health experts say that the second coronavirus wave could prove to be more fatal than the first wave in the country⁴ which claimed 332,186 infected, 6795 lives, left behind 632 on ventilators.² Until November 24, 2020, there were 2954 confirmed cases

and 48 deaths in a day which is highly alarming⁵, after which the authorities announced a smart lockdown from November 26, 2020, as a measure to stop the spread of coronavirus. Other notifications were also released including; closure of educational institutions, ban on indoor events and ceremonies in marriage halls⁶ public and private sectors were directed to ensure that 50% of the staff works from home till January 31 2020.⁷

On December 13, 2020, the cases were 2,456 with 36 deaths in 24 hours.⁸ (Figure-1) Although, now again the number of new cases is gradually reducing but still until 31st December 2020 there were 2463 new cases and 71 deaths in a day is still very alarming. We are very far from the flattening of the curve (Figure-2). Spiking infection rates could swamp the inadequate health system and cripple the economy of the country. If citizens are not provided with proper care or adequate aid as the economy shrinks, public anger is likely to elevate, potentially threatening the social order. We have to be more serious and cautious while playing our roles at the individual level to control the spread of the disease before it's too late and the irreparable damage is done to the economy and community as a whole.

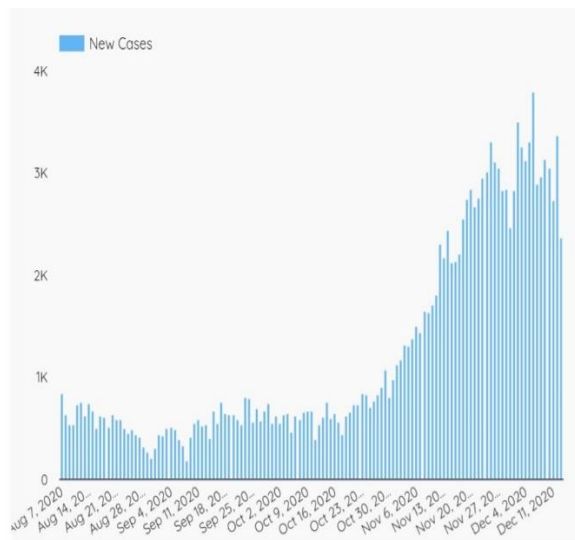


Figure-1: Daily Covid-19 Cases in Pakistan till the first week of December 2020. (<https://covid.gov.pk/stats/pakistan>)

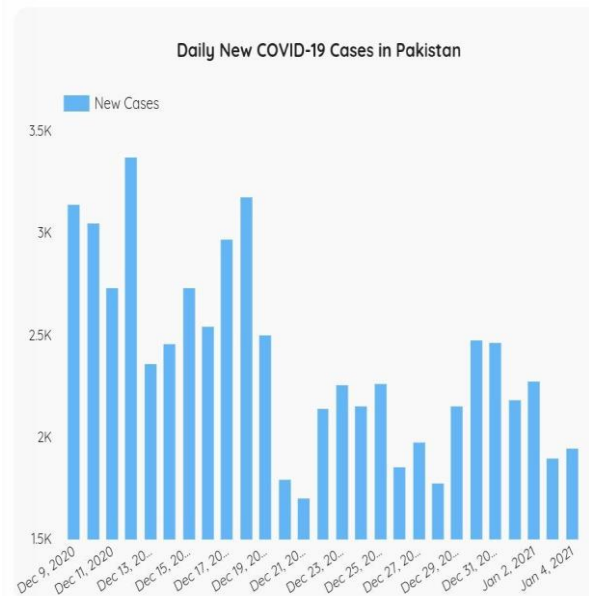


Figure-2: Daily Covid-19 Cases in Pakistan till the first week of January 2021 (<https://covid.gov.pk/stats/pakistan>)

REFERENCES

1. WHO fact sheet COVID 19 situation: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20200409-sitrep-80-covid-19>
2. Shahid R, Zeb S. Second Wave of COVID-19 Pandemic: Its deleterious and mortal repercussion in Pakistan. *JRMC*. 2020 Dec 30;24(4):288-9. doi: <https://doi.org/10.37939/jrhc.v24i4.1554>
3. Shafi M, Liu J, Ren W. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on micro, small, and medium-sized Enterprises operating in Pakistan. *Res Global*. 2020 Dec 1;2(2020):100018. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resglo.2020.100018>
4. Rasheed R, Rizwan A, Javed H, Sharif F, Zaidi A. Socio-economic and environmental impacts of COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan-an integrated analysis. *Environ Sci Pollut Res*. 2021 Jan 6;2021:1-8. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-020-12070-7>
5. Habib A, Anjum KM, Shehzad A, Imran M, Ashraf Z, Ramzan M. Outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan and the current scenario. *Appl Biol Chem J*. 2020 Dec 18; 1(2):67-71.
6. Gazi Ak. The Scenarios of COVID-19 in the Context of the Indian Sub-continent (Bangladesh, India & Pakistan). *International Journal of Crime, Law and Social Issues*. 2020 Dec 7;7(1):10-8.

7. Nawaz A, Su X, Iqbal S, Zahoor H, Asad A, Asghar S, et al. Validating a phenomenological mathematical model for public health and safety interventions influencing the evolutionary stages of recent outbreak for long-term and short-term domains in Pakistan. *Complexity*. 2020 Oct 1;2020: 8866071. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/8866071>
8. Pakistan cases statistics:
<https://covid.gov.pk/stats/pakistan>