

[Second wave may become deadlier with virus mutation](#)

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ISLAMABAD: While a comparative data analysis of the first and second waves of novel coronavirus shows that the first wave was more lethal in Pakistan, health experts believe the ongoing wave may prove deadlier as the virus has mutated itself.

However, the government claims that both waves affected the masses in the same way, with the only difference being that the weather has turned cold.

Officials of the health ministry as well as doctors agree that this time most patients instead of rushing to hospitals prefer to stay indoors and practise self-isolation. Only those with severe symptoms were being brought to hospitals during the renewed wave.

According to a graph of Covid-19 cases available with *Dawn*, the first case of the novel coronavirus disease was reported in Pakistan on February 26. The daily new cases increased to 1,083 on May 4, 2,255 on May 13, 3,039 on May 31, 4,344 on June 3 (14 weeks after the outbreak), 5,485 on June 10 and 6,825 on June 14. As the number of cases started declining afterwards, the daily tally curve touched the highest peak during the first wave in less than 16 weeks.

Govt sees no difference between two waves except cold weather

The cases dropped below 300 a day in September and the curve remained almost straight till October 20 after which the number of daily cases again rose to 1,000. The daily tally of new cases increased to 2,000 on Nov 10, crossed the 3,000 mark on Nov 24, jumped to 3,795 on Dec 6 (seven weeks after the resurgence).

The curve shows that the positivity of Covid-19 cases, which is measured through positive cases per 100 samples, was 11.79 per cent on March 31 and 22.24pc on June 1 before dropping. It was the lowest on Sept 7 when 1.7pc positivity rate was recorded. After the resurgence of cases during the last weeks of October, it climbed to 9.71pc on Dec 7.

‘Virus has mutated’

While talking to *Dawn*, Prof Dr Javaid Usman, a microbiologist, said that the number of new cases during the second wave was more than what was being recorded, as many people were not reporting.

“The virus has mutated itself. Earlier it was M-614. Now it is called 614-G. Its protein-based substance i.e. Aspartate has been replaced with Glycine due to which number of spikes, on the virus, has increased and it has become more transmissible and more infectious.

“In the United States 100,000 persons were being infected but during the second wave number of per day infections has reached to 200,000 and deaths have increased from 1,000 to 3,000 a day.

Earlier deaths were being reported in aged people (over 80 years) but now deaths are being reported in comparatively younger people (of over 70 years),” he said.

Dr Usman said it was observed that there were “fewer chances of full recovery” as people were having complications even after being declared negative. He said people got exhausted soon, their heart beat increased and they faced respiratory problems.

Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) Secretary General Dr Qaisar Sajjad believed many people during the renewed wave were not getting themselves tested. “Majority of people, after having symptoms, isolate themselves and they remain in isolation for 14 days. I fear that the end of December and January will be the most problematic for the masses, as a large number of people might be infected [by then],” he said, adding that the virus had mutated itself and it was observed that people died within a week after getting infected.

“So far, 135 doctors have died,” he said.

An official of the Ministry of National Health Services, requesting anonymity, said there was no evidence to prove that the second wave of Covid-19 in the country was severer than the first one, “but if the trends continue, it is likely to be so.”

He said in the first wave even asymptomatic cases with positive Covid-19 tests were rushing for hospital admissions. But in the second wave, only patients with serious symptoms were turning up to hospitals as rest were either not testing themselves or preferring home isolation over hospitalisation.

‘Peak by year end or next month’

“This wave is, however, expected to last longer as low temperature favours transmission. We may see peak towards the end of December and that may stay throughout January,” the official said.

Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan, told *Dawn* that the virus was a living thing. It mutated itself rather than copying Ribonucleic acid (RNA). “It is the same thing as a person’s son looks a little different from him. That mutation can be beneficial, harmful and neutral. Majority of mutations remain neutral so people should not worry about it,” the PM’s aide said.

He said: “I don’t think that there is any difference in the first and second waves of the pandemic. In the first wave, more people were visiting hospitals because Covid-19 was a new infection and there was less or no awareness in masses. Now people are aware about it and they prefer to remain in isolation till recovery.”

Ventilation

Replying to a question, Dr Sultan said winters could be problematic, as people (families) preferred to stay together in one room. “They close windows due to which they lack ventilation and chances of infection increases. I suggest them to care about the ventilation. Moreover, people don’t get ultraviolet rays,” he said.

So far, the virus has claimed as many as 8,487 lives across the country.

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