

Preparing the Western Pacific Region for the Onset of Large-Scale Community Transmission of Coronavirus Disease 2019

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Abstract

The Corona Virus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to remain a public health emergency of international concern. In the Western Pacific region, the estimates pertaining to the caseload and death rates have shown a big improvement, as the region accounts for 1.8% and 1.3% of the global caseload and deaths worldwide. The available estimates clearly suggest that now the epicenter of the disease has shifted to the European and the American region. However, it will be a wrong assumption to presume that the epidemic is over in the Western Pacific region, and thus it will be a premature decision to be complacent about the outbreak readiness and emergency response action plan. In conclusion, the decline in the number of COVID-19 cases in the Western Pacific region is not a time to relax, as any lacunae on our part will result in a resurgence of the disease. The right approach will be to continue the fight against the disease with the support of individuals, families, societies and the health sector and thus prepare ourselves for a large-scale community transmission.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Western Pacific, China, World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID 19) pandemic continues to remain a public health emergency of international concern and has become the source of fear, apprehensions, and sense of uncertainty in the general population. Till date, a total of 13,876,441 cases and 593,087 deaths have been reported, amounting to a case fatality rate of 4.27% worldwide.^[1] The current estimates suggest that the American Region is the worst affected one accounting for 52.6% of the global caseload.^[1]

COVID-19 in Western Pacific

In the Western Pacific Region, the estimates pertaining to the caseload and death rates have shown a significant decline with the region accounting for 256,788 cases (1.8% of the global caseload) and 7888 deaths (1.3% of the reported deaths), considering the fact that the epicenter of the outbreak was in the region for the initial 2 months of the outbreak.^[1] A total of 15 nations and 4 territories have reported cases in the Western Pacific Region, but it is worth noting that China was the epicenter of the outbreak in the earlier stages.

Ground reality

The available estimates clearly suggest that now the epicenter of the disease has shifted to the other parts of the world. However, it will be a wrong assumption to presume that the epidemic is over in the Western Pacific Region, and thus, it will be a premature decision to be complacent about the outbreak readiness and emergency response action plan.^[2] Each and every nation in the region should continue their ongoing efforts of preparedness and improve the capacity of the health system to respond to the emergence of large scale community transmission. The remarkable success observed in China was owing to the accelerated and dedicated efforts of all the stakeholders,

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and it is the time to replicate similar results in other nations as well.^[2]

Need of the hour

Even though, the nature of the disease outbreak is quite variable based on the quality of the health care delivery services, quality of response plan, or the extent of support received from different stakeholders, the role of some of the strategies is undisputed, and they have shown a significant impact in interrupting the chain of transmission and thus reducing the overall caseload.^[2,3] These strategies essentially include active surveillance to identify new cases, isolation of the detected cases and treating them appropriately, identification of the contacts and subjecting them for quarantine, implementation of strategies to encourage social distancing among people, and adoption of infection prevention and control strategies (such as frequent handwashing, cough etiquette, and correct ways to use remove dispose personal protective equipment) by everyone, including the general population.^[3] Obviously, the successful implementation of all these strategies will require immense support and engagement from the community, and thus, they should be periodically sensitized about the different aspects of the disease.^[2,3]

Other potential recommendations

However, another important aspect of the containment of the infection is that the threat of the emergence of an outbreak or community transmission in any area cannot be completely ruled out till the pandemic continues, as there is always a risk of imported transmission through the travelers.^[4,5] Thus, we have to neutralize the risk of transmission by advising all the travelers to avoid unnecessary travel and as far as possible to stay at home.^[4,5] This time of low transmission should be utilized to enhance the safety of vulnerable population groups (viz. elderly or those with comorbid illnesses) as they are at high risk of adverse outcomes.^[2] At the same time, low risk is not equivalent to now risk, and thus,

young and healthy people should be advised to strictly adhere to the prevention measures. Finally, the nations in the region, which have started to report cases just now, should not be afraid of the outbreak, instead focus on the proven strategies, and continue to intensify their efforts.^[2]

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the decline in the number of COVID 19 cases in the Western Pacific Region is not a time to relax, as any lacunae on our part will result in a resurgence of the disease. The right approach will be to continue the fight against the disease with the support of individuals, families, societies, and the health sector and thus prepare ourselves for a large scale community transmission.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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