

Experts say third COVID wave to hit India by October



Experts say the pandemic will remain a public health threat in India for at least another year
[File: Samuel Rajkumar/Reuters]

New Delhi, June 19 (RHC)-- A third wave of coronavirus infections is likely to hit India by October, and although it will be better controlled than the latest outbreak the pandemic will remain a public health threat for at least another year, according to a Reuters news agency's poll of medical experts.

The June 3-17 snap survey of 40 healthcare specialists, doctors, scientists, virologists, epidemiologists and professors from around the world showed a significant rise in vaccinations will likely provide some cover to a fresh outbreak.

Of those who ventured a prediction, at least 85 percent of respondents, or 21 of 24, said the next wave will hit by October, including three who forecast it as early as August and 12 in September. The remaining three said between November and February.

But more than 70 percent of experts, or 24 of 34, said any new outbreak would be better controlled compared with the current one, which has been far more devastating – with shortages of vaccines, medicines, oxygen and hospital beds – than the smaller first surge in infections last year.

“It will be more controlled, as cases will be much less because more vaccinations would have been rolled out and there would be some degree of natural immunity from the second wave,” said Dr Randeep Guleria, director at the All India Institute Of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

So far, India has only fully vaccinated about five percent of its estimated 950 million eligible population, leaving many millions vulnerable to infections and deaths. While a majority of healthcare experts predicted the vaccination drive would pick up significantly this year, they cautioned against an early removal of restrictions, as some states have done.

When asked if children and those under 18 years would be most at risk in a potential third wave, nearly two-thirds of experts, or 26 of 40, said yes. “The reason being they are a completely virgin population in terms of vaccination because currently there is no vaccine available for them,” said Dr Pradeep Banandur, head of epidemiology department at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS).

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