

# Strategic Government Role in Uttar Pradesh, India's Management of The Covid-19 Pandemic: Part 1 (The First Wave 2020)



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## History

In both the first and second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, the Uttar Pradesh government (headed by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath) had a challenging task in terms of prevention, containment and spread of the COVID-19 infection in such a large state. In this opinion piece, the exemplary and strategic management of COVID-19 during the initial wave in 2020 by the Uttar Pradesh government has been presented.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; COVID-19 infection; Containment; Pulmonary infectious disease; COVID-19 contact tracing

**Abbreviations:** COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019; WHO: World Health Organization; NPSP: National Public Health Surveillance Project

## Opinion

Since the world-wide outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the unprecedented number of infections and associated fatality numbers have placed central as well as the state governments of most countries in very difficult situations. The key to proper containment and management of a pandemic of a pulmonary infectious disease, particularly a viral borne infection such as the COVID-19 lies in effective planning with timely implementation of strategic government policies and interventions [1]. This was of vital importance in the state of Uttar Pradesh which is the biggest and most populated state of India, with a population of 230 million (The World Health Organization, WHO) [2]. In both the first and second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, the Uttar Pradesh government (headed by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath) had a very challenging task in terms of prevention, containment and spread of the COVID-19 infection in such a large state.

During the first wave of COVID-19 last year, the state of Uttar Pradesh was amongst the highest affected states of India with a surging recorded 474 054 COVID-19 cases and over 7000 resulting deaths by the end of October 2020. In the days after the lockdown restrictions were lifted, the Uttar Pradesh government carried out a massive surveillance initiative in conjunction with WHO

officials. It is a well documented fact now that contact tracing and timely isolation of potentially infection individuals plays a big role in the containment of the COVID-19 infection rates [3]. In order to mitigate further spread of the COVID-19 infection following the lifting of lockdown restrictions, the state government of Uttar Pradesh installed a highly effective strategy for contact tracing of potentially infected individuals, evaluating their health status and necessary quarantine needs.

The state government of Uttar Pradesh along with the WHO's National Public Health Surveillance Project (NPSP) team of medical officers, deployed over 801 field monitors who carried out a large-scale initiative for contact tracing of potential new infections due to the already confirmed diagnosed 58, 100 cases of COVID-19 from the state's 75 districts in first 14 days of August 2020. The deployment of this big healthcare force in which over 69 000 front line healthcare staff contacted the high-risk contacts of confirmed COVID-19 positive cases provided a very efficient early as well as systematic contact tracing, tracking and mandatory 14 day quarantine of new infections [2]. The WHO field monitors provided an independent assessment of the Uttar Pradesh state government's contact tracing initiative of containment and mitigation of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the state.

The field monitors carried out telephone interviews of the diagnosed COVID-19 patients and gathered data on the testing status of their family members, causes for not doing a test as well as the plethora of exhibited clinical symptoms. The WHO's NPSP team provided necessary training to local field monitors while the state government regularly reviewed the data and used it to enhance their COVID-19 containment measures. In addition, the Uttar Pradesh government (headed by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath) made excellent use of this initiative to provide much needed COVID-19 public health education to the state's population by outlining the importance of following the norms for infection prevention and control [2]. This step taken by the state government was vital in keeping down the infection rates in the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic as it encouraged patients to share contact details without fear of the then prevalent stigma linked to the infection.

This government initiative was also highly successful in educating the population on the correct scientific and public health characteristics of the infection amidst the massive amounts of misinformation and myths being circulated through social media during the initial phase of the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this initiative was very useful in letting the WHO team give appropriate education to the state's first responders and health care staff regarding vital safety protocols to avoid the COVID-19 infection. This helped in ensuring that these members of staff and their family members (who were in contact with them daily) were safe during data as well as sample collection [2,4].

During this Uttar Pradesh government initiative, over 1 63 526 high-risk contacts were traced and this subsequently helped to contact over 91% of the high-risk contacts who were then subjected to needed test and quarantine protocols. This in a large part is that the early and systematic tracking of contacts strategy that was run by the Uttar Pradesh government utilizing an enhanced monitoring mechanism (this was overseen by the WHO team) was a gold standard public health response which not only mitigated the spread of the COVID-19 infection in the state but contributed vastly to the comparatively low death rates recorded in the initial COVID-19 pandemic wave in 2020 in India [2,5].

The very high quality of this contact tracing strategy was effective in guiding state level policy decision making and the

data collected from this contact tracing initiative is amongst the best practices that helped such a high population state to make an evidence-based, informed public health response to the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This large-scale public health response on the part of the Uttar Pradesh government successfully identified, tested and quarantined thousands of COVID-19 cases which wouldn't have been otherwise found and this in turn helped to prevent the further spread of this deadly viral infection.

The WHO NPSP team provided much needed monitoring of data quality assessment and as a result, most of the COVID-19 policy decisions made by the state government were logical and evidence-based ones. In addition, the government was able to also make swift decisions on the deployment of additional surveillance teams as needed in state districts that presented with the highest case numbers [2,6]. The WHO Country Representative to India lauded the efforts of "the UP government's strategic response to COVID-19 through heightened contact tracing initiatives" and stated that the UP model of COVID-19 management is an exemplary one that should be followed everywhere.

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