

Editorial

The Contagion

The world is witnessing one of the worst disasters ravaging the human race in recent times. The COVID 19 pandemic caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which has claimed more than 110,000 lives in 210 countries (as of 12 April 2020).

The Scenario

The word pandemic is derived from the Greek word "pan" meaning all and "demos" meaning people. A pandemic is defined as "an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries, continents and usually affecting a large number of people". The classical definition includes nothing about population immunity, virology or disease severity.

A true pandemic occurs when almost simultaneous transmission takes place worldwide irrespective of seasons or hemispheric distribution. In the case of pandemic influenza A(H1N1), widespread transmission was documented in both hemispheres between April and September 2009.

The two distinctive characteristics of a pandemic are transmissibility and severity both of which are proving to be considerable in the present scenario.

The Reason

The curse of civilization that is, densely populated metropolitan cities, more extensive trade routes, increased communication between different countries, people, ecosystems and urbanization in the developing world, all have led to rapid transmission of infectious diseases.

The notable pandemic of the past namely the bubonic Plague in the 14th century, (The Black Death), the Great Plague of London (1665, which killed 20% of London's population), the Spanish flu (1918), the "Asian Flu" in East Asia in 1957, (H2N2 strain), and the most recent flu pandemic in the US, the "Swine Flu," in 2009 (novel influenza virus, H1N1), have all taught us important lessons on preparedness, readiness and response strategies to combat them but we humans seem to be caught unaware every time.

The Response

Many countries are using a combination of containment and mitigation activities to delay major surges of patients and level the demand for hospital beds. Most national response strategies include varying levels of contact tracing and quarantine; promotion of public health measures, including handwashing, respiratory hygiene, and social distancing; preparation of health systems for an onslaught of severely ill patients who require isolation, oxygen, and mechanical ventilation; strengthening health facility, infection prevention and control, and postponement or cancellation of large-scale public gatherings. Finally, research gaps about COVID-19 are being addressed and registries are being created for evaluating hydroxychloroquine prophylaxis.

The Consequence

The pandemic has led to severe global socioeconomic disruption, the postponement or cancellation of sporting, religious, political and cultural events, and widespread shortages of supplies exacerbated by panic buying. Schools, universities and colleges have closed in 193 countries, affecting approximately 99.4 percent of the world's student population. Misinformation about the virus is rampant online, and there have been incidents of xenophobia and discrimination.

Two pandemics are engulfing the world at present, the viral and the economic. A pandemic of anxiety over the economic consequences is also at large. Business closures, rising unemployment, and loss of income lead to financial anxiety, which may, in turn, prevent people, desperate for work, from taking adequate precautions against the spread of the disease. Observing successive diminution in stock prices is also creating panic and a vicious cycle.

However every cloud has a silver lining. Due to reduced travel and closures of heavy industry, there has been a decrease in air pollution and carbon emissions, the birds have reappeared on the city treetops. So the human race may yet rise above this mountain of despair and learn from its mistakes.



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