

ARE PEOPLE FROM NORTHEAST INDIA SPREADING THE SARS-CoV-2 INFECTION?

COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This means that the virus has jumped to humans from animals. Studies indicate that this spill-over to humans happened outside the country, and has nothing to do with any particular community or ethnic group in India. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest that people from a specific region or of a certain ethnicity are more likely to spread this virus than others.

Such unfounded and unsubstantiated rumours are not unique to this pandemic. Historians have reported phobias



Credits: Chaipau, Wikimedia Commons. URL: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India-locator-map-NE.svg>. License: CC-BY-SA.

and insecurities pertaining to Jewish communities during the plague pandemic (Black Death) in Europe, to Africans during the Ebola pandemic, and to Chinese in Hong Kong during the SARS-CoV pandemic. In each of these cases, certain people were discriminated and stigmatized due to fears of their association with the spread of the disease. These reactions are harmful and unfair to those being persecuted. Such rumours can create social unrest, and divide us along ethnic, regional, and national lines.

ANY person, irrespective of their ethnic origin, caste, religion, or nationality, who has been in contact with a person with a SARS-CoV-2 infection can get infected. ANY infected person can spread the infection to others if they do not use a mask, or follow quarantine procedures and other precautionary measures.

In this regard, we quote the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India: "Public health emergencies during an outbreak of communicable diseases may cause fear and anxiety, leading to prejudices against people and communities, social isolation, and stigma. Such behaviour may culminate in increased hostility, chaos, and unnecessary social disruptions. There is an urgent need to counter such prejudices, and to rise as a community that is empowered with health literacy, and responds appropriately in the face of this adversity." Humanity survives when together, and falls when divided!

Notes:

1. This response was first published on the Indian Scientists' Response to CoViD-19 (ISRC) website.
2. Source of the image used in the background of the article title: <https://pixabay.com/photos/coronavirus-corona-virus-covid-19-4958989/>. Credits: thiagolazarino, Pixabay. License: CC-0.

Indian Scientists' Response to CoViD-19 (ISRC) is a group of more than 500 Indian scientists, engineers, technologists, doctors, public health researchers, science communicators, journalists and students who voluntarily came together in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This group can be contacted at indscicov@gmail.com.