PAKISTAN CORONAVIRUS CIVICACTS CAMPAIGN

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With the continuous spread of COVID-19 in Pakistan; Accountability Lab is continuously building on its work with district governments and Community Front Liners (network of volunteers) through Coronavirus CivActs Campaign (CCC) to debunk rumours, fake news & misinformation related to COVID-19. The Coronavirus CivActs Campaign supported by the Open Society Foundation also conducts fact-checking, synthesizes data, pushes out the verified information through weekly bulletins and social media campaign for mass awareness, and gathers feedback on the COVID19 response in Pakistan. The bulletins are disseminated in five languages including English, Urdu, Pashto, Punjabi & Sindhi to reach far and wide to help citizens build resilience and fight against the pandemic. These bulletins are also shared with a range of stakeholders from the general public, to government departments, development agencies, CSOs and humanitarian networks via online and offline means.

The campaign also highlights important government decisions, information about vaccination drives, community feedback and concerns related to COVID-19. The objective of the campaign is to enhance awareness among the most vulnerable segments of the society including women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, transgenders and persons with disabilities. In the current phase of the campaign, Accountability Lab has also engaged the local female community leaders and building their capacity through training and active civic engagement to counter-myths and disseminate facts around COVID-19 and gender issues.

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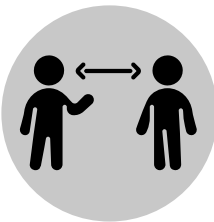## COVID-19 vaccines are not effective against OMICRON variant

FACT ✓ **OR** **MYTH** ✗

The spread of the new Omicron virus is on the rise and researchers are anxious to discover whether the pre-existing COVID-19 vaccines will be sufficient against it. A study conducted by Medrxiv evaluated this relationship and concluded that two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine are not solely effective against the transmissibility of the Omicron variant, although they do provide protection against severe disease. A further booster shot is required to provide sufficient immunity. Another conclusion of this study thus remains that the risk or threat of the Omicron variant remains high, because of the ineffectiveness of simple vaccination against it. The myth prevalent among the public, however, is that scientists will come up with a new or unique vaccination for the Omicron variant, whereas the recommendation is to simply get a booster shot on top of the two doses of Covid-19 vaccination in order to stay protected.

Source: Medrxiv, Healthline

PREVENTIVE MEASURES THAT CAN BE TAKEN AGAINST CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Wear a mask that has two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric and covers your mouth, nose and chin. It should not be loose on the sides.

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Practice physical distancing outside your home by keeping a distance of 3 feet between you and others.

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Get registered for vaccination as soon as possible and follow all pre and post-vaccination guidelines.

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Avoid unnecessary contact with eyes, nose and mouth as that increases chances of virus transfer.

Keep yourself and your environment clean.

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If you fall sick, stay at home and contact a healthcare provider.

+

Avoid unnecessary outdoor socialising and spending time in crowded spaces

Source: WHO; Harvard Health Publishing; CDC

WHO RECOMMENDS TWO NEW DRUGS TO TREAT COVID-19

The good news for the COVID-19 community is that WHO has recommended two new drugs to treat COVID-19, further increasing the options available to treat this disease. The actual effectiveness of these drugs, however, will depend on their relative availability and affordability.

The first new drug introduced is Baricitinib, which is strongly recommended for people with severe or critical COVID-19. It is interesting to note that Baricitinib is an oral drug, used in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. The second new drug is a monoclonal antibody drug, Sotrovimab, ideal for treating mild or moderate COVID-19 in patients who are at high risk of hospitalization.

The panel of experts who developed these drugs also looked at two other drugs for severe and critical COVID-19: namely ruxolitinib and tofacitinib. However, given their uncertain effects, WHO made a conditional recommendation against their use.

Source: WHO

NEW STEPS TAKEN BY NCOC AFTER COVID-19 RESURGE

On Saturday, 15th January 2022, the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) reviewed existing protocols and called on the health and education ministers to suggest a new set of guidelines for the fifth wave of Covid-19 spreading across the country and the globe.

With regards to the aviation sector, the NCOC decided to implement a complete ban on inflight serving of meals and snacks with effect from January 17. The NCOC has asked the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to ensure inflight mask-wearing and also implement COVID-19 SOPs at all airports. Similarly, serving meals and snacks in public transport will also be banned with effect from January 17. NCOC also directed federating units to strictly enforce existing protocols especially in transport, education, and sectors; and in public spaces like restaurants and wedding halls. The NCOC further took the decision to ban indoor dining and weddings for cities with COVID positivity rate over 10pc. In the end, the forum discussed the epidemic curve chart data, disease prevalence, and proposed NPIs in wake of rising disease trends in the country, especially in the urban centres.

Source: The News

This week we interviewed Yasir Farooqui, an IT professional working at 'Integry', to learn about his experience of the pandemic and how it affected members of the IT sector of Pakistan.

Yasir Farooqui is currently serving as the head of engineering at a Pakistani startup called Integry. He has been in this industry for about the last 14 years and his overall experience has been completely around software development where he has been providing his services as software engineer, project manager, integrations lead, software architect and now as head of engineering at Integry where he is taking care of all engineering related matters.

In your opinion, what has been the overall impact of Covid-19 on the IT sector of Pakistan?

The pandemic affected many industries. It also partially impacted the IT industry. I say partially for the IT industry because the IT sector was not affected that badly and in fact it created some opportunities for the people as well that I will discuss in the following points. The pandemic mainly caused the uncertainty. We know that the Pakistan IT industry (i would specifically talk about software development) is highly dependent on the international market. Countries like Pakistan are used as offshore development partners because the cost is cheaper in these countries. Now there are different types of software development markets. For example if there is a real estate industry or a restaurant software which was being developed by people in Pakistan, these industries got badly impacted due to the pandemic and hence the owners just paused any further development work on these software applications, this surely impacted the people working from within Pakistan for these international customers. Similarly any startups working here in Pakistan and looking for any international fundings got impacted because people paused any further investments during the Covid period.

What difficulties did you face in adapting to the new work arrangements and how did you resolve them?

I work for a startup that was started in 2017 and we went on a remote team modelling from the start so Covid was nothing new for us in terms of working from home or not going to office. However other people that I know struggled a bit while working from home because these are totally different arrangements and even companies are not used to managing their employees remotely. It takes a lot of time for a company to be able to make proper arrangements and processes to manage work remotely.

How was the experience of working in this sector different from those of your colleagues/relatives working in other sectors, during the pandemic?

As per my observation, the IT industry survived little more than any other sector because IT (again specifically talking about software development) people only requires power, internet and a computer machine and they can easily work remotely as compared to other sectors where human interaction is required like sales, marketing, event management etc. So I personally think that the experience for IT people during the pandemic was smoother.

What are some of the opportunities this pandemic has presented to the IT sector?

One type of opportunity that I have seen during the pandemic for IT people is the ability to work remotely. When you are working remotely, it doesn't matter if you are working for a local company or for an international organisation. I noticed that an international organisation took advantage of this situation and started hiring people remotely. Personally I think people switched more and found better jobs / opportunities during the pandemic.

As a representative of this sector, how did you see it before and after the pandemic?

I think this point can be summarised from the above points. The pandemic overall provided more opportunities to the software development industry. It made them think about even better opportunities and made people able to work remotely and with limited resources.

Where can I get tested?

Islamabad	**National Institute of Health** Park Road, Chak Shahzad, Islamabad
Karachi	**Agha Khan University Hospital,** Stadium Road, Karachi, Sindh
Hyderabad	**Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS),** Liberty Market Roundabout, Liaquat University Hospital, Hyderabad
Khairpur	**Gambat Institute of Medical Sciences,** Gambat, Khairpur, Sindh
Peshawar	**Hayatabad Medical Complex** Phase-4 Phase 4 Hayatabad, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
Mardan	**Chughtai Lab** Mardan point, near Allied Bank, Shamsi Road, Mardan, KP
Haripur	**Excel Labs,** TMA Plaza Shop No. 6, Near Girls Degree College Circular Road Haripur, KP
Lahore	**Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital,** 7A Block R-3 M.A. Johar Town, Lahore, Punjab
Multan	**Nishtar Hospital** Nishtar Road, Justice Hamid Colony, Multan
Rawalpindi	**Armed Forces Institute of Pathology,** Range Road, CMH Complex, Rawalpindi, Punjab
Quetta	**Fatima Jinnah Hospital** Bahadurabad, Wahdat Colony, Quetta
Muzaffarabad	**Abbas Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS),** Ambore, Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir
Gilgit	**District Headquarters Hospital,** Hospital Road, Gilgit, GB

For more cities visit the **COVID-19 Health Advisory Platform**

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