

## **Minister exhort scientists to develop COVID-19 mitigation solutions within timeframe**

By Jyoti Singh

New Delhi, April 13 (India Science Wire): Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, Dr Harsh Vardhan, exhorts scientists to develop COVID-19 mitigation solutions within a fixed time frame. “We are in midst of a war and we have to supply the weapons on time. If we supply the weapons when the war is over or have made huge destruction the weapons are useless. It is not like routine CSIR research job,” said Dr Harsh Vardhan. He was addressing a review meeting through video conferencing with Dr Shekhar Mande, Director General of Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and all the 38 CSIR lab directors.

“India has high expectations from its scientific community and I am sure that the community will rise to the occasion and deliver in this time of need” he said. He appreciated the efforts made by CSIR labs so far. He mentioned that the testing capacity of suspected persons would also be increased soon by many folds. Already 14 CSIR labs are participating in the testing of swab samples of suspected COVID-19 patients.

In the meeting, he also appreciated the efforts being made by the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) and the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) as they are working on the genome sequencing of the virus. Genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 will help understand how the virus spreads, where the virus came from, and is this virus strain different from those seen in other parts of the world. “These institutes have started doing genetic sequencing of virus with a target of doing 500 sequencing in coming weeks,” he said.

Plasma therapy is another area where the researchers are working. “Plasma from the cured patient is taken as it has antibodies that can be used to treat severely ill patient,” he told. Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) has got approval from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to provide innovative treatment to patients suffering from COVID-19 disease. India is now part of “Solidarity” clinical trails launched by World Health Organisation (WHO) to help find an effective treatment for COVID-19.

During the meeting, Dr Shekhar Mande said a Core Strategy Group (CSG) has been set up and five verticals have been identified under which coronavirus-related activities are being carried out. These include digital and molecular surveillance, rapid and economical diagnostics, new drugs/repurposing of drugs and associated production processes, hospital-assistive devices and PPEs; and supply chain and logistics support systems.

"COVID-19 has also come as a blessing in disguise as it will give a boost to the country's resilience and self-reliance, and enhance indigenous capacity in developing critical health care equipment," the minister said. (India Science Wire)

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