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Press Release

India is the 5th country globally to isolate the COVID-19 virus strain *The isolation by ICMR's National Institute of Virology will help in future development of drugs, vaccines and rapid diagnostic kits*

New Delhi, March 13, 2020: Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the apex health research body of India has successfully isolated the COVID-19 virus strain. The isolation is the first step towards expediting the development of drugs, vaccines and rapid diagnostic kits in the country. The other countries that have isolated the virus are Japan, Thailand, United States of America and China. ICMR has been closely working with the Ministry of Health, and other departments to coordinate the effort to tackle COVID-19.

ICMR, which is also the testing agency for the virus, has expanded its network of labs equipped to test COVID-19 from 51 to 65. The secondary test for reconfirmation of the virus which was earlier conducted only in National Institute of Virology have also been expanded to 31 labs. These steps will enable India to expedite detection of the virus and will help in effective management.

Till date ICMR has tested more than 6500 samples of 5900 individuals, out of which 78 cases have been tested positive for the virus. ICMR is equipped to handle more volumes of samples if the need arises.

Prof (Dr) Balram Bhargava, Secretary, Department of Health Research & Director General, ICMR, said "People should not panic, but take precautionary measures. Strong systems and processes are in place to deal with COVID-19 and the Ministry is constantly monitoring the situation. We at ICMR have been constantly in a vigil mode and our laboratories have enough capacity to test. We will be issuing advisories and revising guidelines for testing as and when necessary." In a query regarding ongoing paranoia about what to eat or not Eat, DG, ICMR said eating non-veg (chicken or eggs) is not related to COVID-19.

About ICMR: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi, the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research, is one of the oldest medical research bodies in the world. ICMR's research agenda align with the National health priorities. These efforts are undertaken with a view to reduce the total burden of disease and to promote health and well-being of the population. ICMR promotes biomedical research in the country through intramural as well as extramural research. Visit us at <http://icmr.gov.in>