



Press Release

Dr. Rajiv Bahl, Secretary, Department of Health Research and Director-General, ICMR addresses press conference on advancements in public health research in India

Dr. Rajiv Bahl addressed a press conference today at ICMR, outlining ICMR's vision for health research in India and discussed salient public health issues, including the recent Nipah outbreak.

New Delhi, 15 September 2023: Today, Dr. Rajiv Bahl, Secretary, Department of Health Research and Director-General, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) addressed a press conference at ICMR, discussing the institute's vision for public health in India, identifying opportunities for advancing the country's Research and Innovation (R&I) in the next 25 years. During the press conference, Dr. Bahl also discussed various public health issues, including the recent Nipah outbreak.

A summary of the key issues discussed is outlined below.

- **Strengthening public health research in India:** In the last few years, the government has undertaken various interventions to strengthen and advance public health research in India. As part of these ongoing interventions, ICMR has worked to streamline its Intramural Research Program funding, to strengthen research on various priority health issues. ICMR has also worked to expand funding under its Extramural Research Program (ERP), to enhance funding for research on vaccines, drugs, disease diagnostics and treatments for stronger public health systems.
- **National Health Research Program:** With the launch of the National Health Research Program, ICMR will be collaborating on large multistakeholder studies with national and state level Departments of Health and Family Welfare, on 12 key health areas, including infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, child health and nutrition, generating critical evidence for strengthening health interventions on these issues.
- **Strengthening One-Health Approach in Public Health Research:** Under the government's PM-ABHIM program, ICMR is collaborating with eight premier scientific organisations in India to establish a National Institute of One Health, to roll out the National One Health Mission across the country and strengthening multidisciplinary approaches in health research. Additionally, ICMR is working to expand its network of BSL-3 and BSL-4 laboratories, to strengthen diagnostic infrastructure and enhance access to laboratory services across nation.
- **Combatting the Nipah Outbreak:** There have been six confirmed cases of Nipah and two confirmed deaths as of now. Current evidence indicates that the outbreak is limited to the Kozhikode district of Kerala. Though Nipah virus has high mortality of 40-70%, it is important to note that in the earlier outbreaks the scale remains small and for a short time period. In 2018, a total 18 lab confirmed cases were reported and the outbreak was contained within a month. Therefore, it is important to place measures for containment at the earliest. The

state health authorities have implemented necessary protocols and are continuing efforts to contain the virus and prevent further spread, with support from NCDC, ICMR and others. ICMR has deployed its mobile BSL-3 laboratory on-ground to test samples. This is in addition to testing at ICMR-NIV's BSL-4 laboratory. Furthermore, the network of Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDLs) in Kozikhode has been activated. Teams from ICMR's National Institute of Virology (ICMR-NIV) and National Institute of Epidemiology (ICMR-NIE) have been deployed on-ground and are working with state authorities to strengthen containment efforts. It is also advised that people take certain precautionary measures against Nipah, including handwashing, avoiding contact with body fluids of infected or suspected cases, avoiding areas where bats are known to roost and contact with bats as well as avoid consumption of raw foods that may be contaminated by bats, such as raw date palm sap or raw fruits.

About ICMR: *The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi, is 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 priorities align with the National health priorities. These efforts are undertaken with a view to reducing 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 <https://www.icmr.gov.in/>*

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