

CENTRE ASKS STATES TO WATCH CASES OF RESPIRATORY ILLNESS

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November 26, 2023 02:59 pm | Updated November 27, 2023 02:05 am IST - NEW DELHI

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A man carries a child as they leave a children's hospital in Beijing on Friday, Nov. 24, 2023. Chinese officials say they did not detect any 'unusual or novel diseases' in the country, the World Health Organisation said on Thursday, following an official request by the U.N. health agency for information about a potentially worrying spike in respiratory illnesses and clusters of pneumonia in children. | Photo Credit: AP

Union Health Ministry on November 26 directed State Governments to ensure that the trends of influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory illness (SARI) be closely monitored by the district and State surveillance units of Integrated Disease Surveillance Project, particularly of children and adolescents.

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The action comes following the recent reports indicating a surge in [respiratory illness in children in northern China](#) in the past few weeks.

States have also been asked to send nasal and throat swab samples of patients with ILI/SARI, particularly of children and adolescents, to Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories located in the States for testing for respiratory pathogens.

In a letter by issued by the Ministry, States have been advised to immediately review public health and hospital preparedness measures viz. availability of HR, hospital beds, drugs & vaccines for influenza, medical oxygen, antibiotics, personal protective equipment, testing kits and reagents, functionality of oxygen plants and ventilators, infection control practices in health facilities, at a senior level.

All States and Union Territories are to implement 'Operational Guidelines for Revised Surveillance Strategy in the context of COVID-19' — which provides for integrated surveillance of respiratory pathogens presenting as cases of ILI and SARI.

"The Health Ministry has proactively decided to review the preparedness measures against respiratory illnesses, as a matter of abundant caution. This is noted to be important in view of the ongoing influenza and winter season that results in an increase in respiratory illness cases. The government of India is closely monitoring the situation, and indicated that there is no need

for any alarm,” said a senior Health Ministry official.

The Union Health Ministry maintained that the data of ILI/SARI from the States is required to be uploaded on a Central portal particularly from the public health institutions, including medical college hospitals.

“The cumulative effect of implementation of these precautionary and proactive collaborative measures is expected to counter any potential situation and ensure the safety and well-being of the citizens,” the Ministry said in its statement.

Recently, information shared by World Health Organisation (WHO) has indicated an increase in respiratory illness in northern parts of China. This is predominantly attributed to usual causes like Influenza, mycoplasma pneumonia, SARS-CoV-2 etc.

According to WHO, the release of COVID-19 restrictions coinciding with the onset of winter season in addition to cyclical trend of respiratory illnesses such as mycoplasma pneumonia have led to this surge. While WHO has sought additional information from Chinese authorities, it is assessed that there is no cause for any alarm at the moment.

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