Social Distancing: The Social Vaccine for Covid 19

**Abstract:** Social distancing measures are steps we can take to minimize social contact or interaction between individuals. Social distancing, also called “physical distancing,” means practice of ensuring a minimum distance of 6 feet between two people to ensure that one person cannot contract the infection from another person. That’s because this infection spread when people cough, sneeze, or touch surfaces on which the coronavirus resides. This is reason why, it is the most effective “social vaccines” available to fight this pandemic and considered “one of the most powerful weapons” against COVID-19. The whole World will face social distancing strategies for “a very long time” until unless critical care capacity is increased substantially or its treatment or a coronavirus vaccine is developed in near future to build up immunity and to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** Social distancing, Covid 19, World Health Organization, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. 2020, Namaste.

**SUMMARY**

COVID-19, caused by a novel beta coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is a respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. On January 30th, 2020 the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus 2019 was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO). It was declared a global pandemic on the 11th of March 2020, now affecting more than 235 countries with more than 4 million cases and 290 thousand deaths worldwide (World Health Organization 2020; & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020).

COVID-19 spreads mainly through close contact from person-to-person by respiratory droplets from someone who is infected with it. Asymptomatic or just somewhat sick people can even shed infection and contaminate others (About 50%). There is no vaccine available till date for it and there is no such possibility in the near future; as vaccines whatsoever fast, its development may be, will take at least one year or so (Eastern Mediterranean Region – WHO. 2020).

Shall we sit quietly in the absence of vaccine! Let the virus infect millions and millions of people and engulf the whole globe. We all knows that it won’t stop in absence of herd immunity till it infects at least 60% (taking $R_0=2.5$) of world’s population. If all these cases become uncontrolled and health system get jeopardized (which is inevitable in absence of control measures) it will kill millions people worldwide. (At current rates of death at 3-10%) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020; & Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. 2020).

So, what we can do to contain it? The only answer that seems a ray of hope in this time of uncertainty and no vaccine available is “Social Distancing”.

What precisely does social distancing mean? Social distancing measures are steps we can take to minimize social contact or interaction between individuals. Social distancing, also called “physical distancing,” means practice of ensuring a minimum distance of 6 feet between two people to ensure that one person cannot contract the infection from another person. That’s because this infection spread when people cough, sneeze, or touch surfaces on which the coronavirus resides. This is reason why, it is the most effective “social vaccines” available to fight this pandemic and considered “one of the most powerful weapons” against COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020; & Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health. 2020).
We all know, still there is no biomedical vaccine for SARS-CoV-2/Covid-19. Effective treatments to reduce deaths with Covid-19 may emerge in few days, but till then, and even afterwards, a social vaccine is needed. It is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick eg, people more than 60 years of age, pregnant women, hypertensive, diabetics, or person having others comorbidity etc. What we need most right currently to slow the spread of this new Corona virus is a full usage of social distancing as it will without any doubt helps in decreasing the transmission of Corona virus (COVID-19) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020; & John, TJ, & Tharyan, P. 2020).

So, how social distancing is implementing? (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. 2020)
- Great everyone with wave or “Namaste”, No handshakes, No hugs.
- Avoid going out except for essential basic needs like grocery and medicin.es.
- Keeping at least 6 feet space between you and others whenever you are market places, grocery stores, daily utility stores, public places, govt. offices, banks, electricity or water bill counters, post offices, health care settings, at any public place per se; till the pandemic subsides.
- Maintaining a strategic distance from social affairs of in excess of 10 individuals and other crowd.
- While meeting somebody outside of your family unit, attempting to stay separated at least 6 feet.
- Stay away from close contact with somebody who is sneezing or coughing.
- Significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and relatives, if possible.
- Stay in contact utilizing other mode of communication like telephone, web, and online networking.
- Use phone or online administrations to contact your family doctor or other fundamental administrations.
- Work from home whenever possible.

Maintaining physical distancing along with wearing cloth masks or facial coverings, regular hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer and cough etiquette along with regular disinfection of oneself and one’s surroundings by 100% of people is the key to preventing infection (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020a; & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020b).

If we do not perform physical distancing or enact other measures to slow the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus can infect millions of people in a matter of a few months. Importance of Social distancing can be explained by mathematical model as below.

![Figure-1: The Math behind Social Distancing](Visualcapitalist. 2020)

Effective implementation of social distancing helps in “flatten the curve” (reduce total no of cases as well as the rate of their occurrence) till effective treatments will be discovered that dramatically reduce the mortality, viral loads and infection transmission. Social distancing can build societal immunity to the devastating effects of this COVID-19 (Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health. 2020; & Flattening the curve. 2020).
People are more likely to practice these behaviors if all Political and religious leaders promote them publicly and consistently, the whole community believes in their importance, and if proper information, support, and IEC materials are available and accessible.

It was “impossible to say” when an effective treatment would be available. A vaccine for the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is at least a year or more away. It could take even longer time for a large-scale vaccination programme to then become viable. The most successful of therapies identified till now have limited benefits at its best. Achieving herd immunity could possibly lead to millions of deaths worldwide and hence not realistically possible (World Health Organization, 2020a).

Combine this with the seemingly unstoppable nature of the Sars-Cov-2 infection that has ripped its way through the whole world and there is only one feasible option: Implementation of Large-scale social distancing. In fact, according to health experts, some form of intermittent social distancing may be needed in place until 2022. That because once the initial wave of COVID-19 infections has passed, further outbreaks may occur. If lockdown restrictions (Closure of all educational establishments like schools, universities etc, gyms, museums, cultural and social centres, swimming pools and theatres) are eased out at the same time, instead of in coordinated phases, a surge in new cases could overwhelm healthcare systems (Branwell, H. 2020).

Some people hope that outbreaks of the new coronavirus will wane as temperature rises, but this pandemic of COVID-19 often doesn’t behave in the same way as other seasonal outbreaks. Many health experts had already cautioned against banking too much on the virus to dying down over the high temperature in summers. So, we should don’t pin hopes on summer or high temperature, social distancing still best the most potent Covid ‘vaccine’ right now. More likely, the Sars-Cov-2 virus is here to stay, recurring intermittently as the seasons come and go, much like influenza (World Health Organization, Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) Pandemic 2020).

Social distancing and isolation that accompanies long-term lockdowns are might be a risk factor for anxiety, mood disorders, addictive and thought disorders. It is likely to lead to negative mental health outcome among children and youths. This issue must be addressed by channelized their energy in the positive way like involvement in reading some good books, gardening, cooking, music, mask making, or another innovative works like making useful thing out of waste products at home etc. (Sharma, V. et al 2020).

The whole World will face social distancing strategies for "a very long time" until unless critical care capacity is increased substantially or its treatment or a coronavirus vaccine is developed in near future to build up immunity and to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, we are going to have to live with some degree of social and physical distancing for long time.

REFERENCES


