

# Andaman & Nicobar has started conducting 'pool tests' for Covid-19 — first in the country

Five samples per testing kit, that's what a "pool test" looks like in the Andaman & Nicobar islands for the past 10 days. Rest of resource-poor India may follow suit.

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**New Delhi:** The Andaman and Nicobar administration has been 'pool testing' the samples of suspected coronavirus patients to reduce the number of test kits used, in view of the acute shortage of kits across the country.

They have been conducting these Covid-19 tests for the past ten days and according to government sources, the union territory is the first to do so in India.

The process involves testing multiple swab samples in a single test. If the combined sample tests positive for

coronavirus, the samples are then tested individually to determine who has the infection. This reduces the number of test kits utilised, compared to the testing of individual samples.

“Five samples per testing kit are used. So, less than 25 kits are being used for testing 100 samples,” a government official told ThePrint.

The government sources also indicated that the method has been approved by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and with several states running out of test kits, the rest of the country is **reportedly** going to follow suit.

## **Cost-effective way of testing**

Over 620 tests have been conducted by the administration in Andaman and Nicobar, which has a population of approximately four lakh people.

In a tweet Friday, Chetan Sanghi, chief secretary of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands said that one-fourth of test kits are being used by pooling samples leading to more tests on an average in the union territory.

A **study** by researchers at the Texas A&M University, Centre for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy (CDDEP) and Princeton University in the US had assessed the feasibility of pooled real-time Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) testing. The RT-PCR test is used to determine whether an individual has contracted Covid-19.

The study revealed that pooling test samples is cost-effective and can determine an estimation of the prevalence of the infection, especially in countries with limited resources.

## **11 confirmed coronavirus cases in Andaman and Nicobar**

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are home to five endangered indigeneous tribes and were one of the first to stop the entry of non-residents and outsiders on 22 March, to curb the spread of the virus.

The union territory had confirmed 11 cases of coronavirus, nine of whom **had participated** in the Tablighi Jamaat's event in Delhi last month.

When compared to other island nations like Maldives and Malta, Andaman and Nicobar has the least cases. Maldives has reported 19 cases while Malta has 350 confirmed cases of coronavirus.

Following the Tablighi Jamaat development, intense contact tracing was carried out by the authorities. Additionally, people who had allegedly attended the Jamaat event on two flights to the Andamans were also isolated and most of them were tested.

Ten patients have recovered from the infection and will be shifted from hospitals to institutional quarantine for two weeks. Till Saturday, only one active case of Covid-19 was confirmed in the islands.