

# Coronavirus: India needs to proactively identify hotspots to stop millions from getting infected, says director of CDDEP

By [Shereen Bhan](#) | Apr 09, 2020, 06:49 AM IST (Updated)

The coronavirus pandemic is crippling developed countries as they were caught unawares on how to tackle an outbreak of this proportion.

The US -- the worst-hit nation -- has reported over 4 lakh positive cases and more than 12,800 deaths so far. Spain, Italy and France are other badly-affected countries that are working hard on containing the spread of the virus. Experts argue that the damage seen worldwide is because countries underestimated the threat posed by this disease.

Back in India, there has been a significant rise in the number of new cases over the last week with an average 500 cases being reported daily.

CNBC-TV18 Managing Editor Shereen Bhan gets in conversation with professor Ramanan Laxminarayan, Director of Washington-based Centre for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy (DDEP) to find out how India could deal with the pandemic.

Professor Laxminarayan had earlier warned of a massive outbreak in India and raised red flags suggesting that India should prepare for a tsunami of cases.

Reviewing his position on India's situation he said, "Modelling is used for two purposes, it is used to project what will happen in the absence of any intervention and is used to tell you what would happen under various interventions.

"We have come along from the original projection of about 300-500 million infections, which is not a bad thing per se. It is only the proportion that is asymptomatic or symptomatic or severe that really matters. The proportion that is severe is really the ones that we care about."

"It now appears that there are probably a lot more cases of infection that are asymptomatic -- people who don't exhibit any symptoms or very little symptoms go on to spread the virus. Now this is bad, but it helps build up population immunity over time."

Talking about sample testing, he said, "Expanded testing is good news as we can identify patients who can potentially be carriers of the virus."

On the strategy that can be implemented to get out of the lockdown, professor Laxminarayan, "We are identifying hotspots based on past testing data, what we need to do is identify potential hotspots by proactively testing samples. The second step should be to tackle areas where there is a high risk of additional spread of coronavirus.

"For example, if I had to two places to monitor for hotspots say one Dharavi and the other a housing society – I would test more samples from Dharavi as the potential for the virus is spread is so much greater there."

Thirdly, he said that testing in places where healthcare facilities are poor or non-existent should be expedited because if the epidemic goes out of control, it will be difficult to handle situation.

Sharing his thoughts on using plasma to treat people, he said, "Everything is in the early stage. The idea of using plasma to treat people is an age-old one. This used to be done when there were no ethical rules governing clinical trials. Today we can't do that. We have very different expectations as a society which means that if we are going to deploy a vaccine on the population at scale, we better be sure that the vaccine does not cause any unintended consequence and puts a patient at risk. The way to approach this now is to be calm, we have gone through one phase quite well, we need to figure out a way to get out of the lockdown."