

Govt's muted response to looming health crisis questioned

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KARACHI: Amid growing concerns of experts over delay by government authorities in strict enforcement of Covid-19 related preventive measures at public and private places, the city reported 759 new cases of coronavirus on Saturday, including 21 of the Omicron variant.

According to a statement released by Chief Minister House, out of 14,868 tests conducted in the past 24 hours 938 came coronavirus positive. The majority of these cases (759) were reported in Karachi.

“Unfortunately, three more patients died, raising the Covid-19 mortality numbers so far to 7,681. As many as 9,076 patients are under treatment; 8,817 at home, 110 at isolation units and 149 patients at hospitals. Of them, 142 patients are in critical condition,” the statement said.

It also stated that the total number of Omicron cases detected so far now stood at 328, which constituted 87.5 per cent current detection rate.

Out of 938 new cases in province, 759 test positive for Covid-19 in Karachi alone

“The Omicron variant has become the dominant strain in the city, though there are cases of the Delta variant, too,” said Dr Saeed Khan, professor of molecular pathology heading the Sindh Public Health Laboratory at the Dow University of Health Sciences.

The laboratory conducts genome sequencing of selected samples received from different sources including the health department.

“The Omicron variant is less in disease severity for those who are healthy, young and vaccinated. It poses serious risk to the elderly or even young people who have some sort of health complications, people with suppressed immune system and those who are either unvaccinated or were vaccinated over six months back and no longer have a strong defence against the virus,” he explained.

He emphasised the need for caution and ensuring strict compliance with Covid-19 related standard operative procedures (SOPs).

The city's healthcare system, he said, had limited capacity and even admission of a few hundred patients could lead to emergence of a crisis.

Expressing concern over the general public's casual response to the situation, Dr Qaiser Sajjad, representing the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), called upon the government to ensure strict implementation of SOPs.

"It's surprising and shocking that on the one hand the government releases alarming stats and, on the other, there is no action and no strategy to address the looming health crisis," he said, adding that all kinds of social activities, including weddings, were going on in the city without any restriction.

The experts, he pointed out, were not demanding closure of businesses. "What is needed now is strict implementation of SOPs either through fine or punishment. Also, we are concerned that the prevalence of Omicron and Delta, both at the same time, might help the virus mutate, creating more challenges for the healthcare system," he noted.

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