

## CORRESPONDENCE

## Nepal's COVID-19 Crisis: A Global Call to Arms

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To the Editor,

There have been several logistics and preparedness challenges in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic, and the emergence of the newer strains and a devastating second wave in South Asia is the most recent peril. When India, a neighboring country to Nepal, experienced the second wave of COVID-19 and was reporting a staggering number of daily new cases and deaths, Nepal was only 2 weeks behind. The double mutant variant B.1.617, the global variant of concern now spreading in Nepal is appearing to be more contagious and fatal and is showing signs of an impending catastrophe.

As of June 7, 2021, there have been 591,494 confirmed cases in Nepal and the fatality count stands at 7,990. There were 4,472 daily infections and 92 registered deaths/day, decreased from 225/day during the peak of the pandemic on May 11, 2021.<sup>1</sup> In a country with 80% of the country living in rural areas where testing capacities are limited, the data is still largely underreported. The actual toll far exceeds the official count, the positivity rate was reported to be 44% which is the highest recorded until now.

The country's second wave has become the worst the world has seen so far. For a population of 29 million people, Nepal currently has only 1,127 ICU beds and 453 ventilators for the entire population. The fragile healthcare system is already overwhelmed with every emergency room full of patients. Due to the unavailability of ICU beds, ventilators, oxygen, and other vital resources, sick patients are forced to stay at home with home isolation and treatment. It is not uncom-

mon to see healthcare and frontline workers treating patients without appropriate PPEs and masks, thereby endangering their own lives. The situation is dire, and resources are saturated. Nepal is now in the 5<sup>th</sup> week of national lockdown, leaving people at risk of further impoverishment and crisis. Only humanitarian aid from foreign countries can help mitigate the unprecedented disaster.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to medical supplies, Nepal needs its people to be vaccinated. There is a vast variation in vaccination rates around the world with low-income countries with alarming low rates. Nepal has only 2.4% of the population fully vaccinated and 4.9% partially vaccinated as of Jun 6, 2021.<sup>3</sup> The global vaccine inequities should be addressed, and Nepal should be prioritized in terms of vaccine allocations given the rise of the pandemic and surge in COVID-19 cases.

The second wave of COVID-19 is not merely an isolated event but rather a harbinger of a potential disaster to the entirety of South Asia and globally. The unprecedented surge of cases and continuing rise in patients with COVID-19 requiring medical attention is a humanitarian crisis call to arms. Without a rapid response from the global community, South Asia will be facing a dire medical future, one that will include a massive number of preventable deaths. There is a need for international collaboration to fight this pandemic because millions of lives are at stake.

**Conflict of Interest:** Each author declares that he or she has no commercial associations (e.g. consultancies, stock ownership, equity interest, patent/licensing arrangement etc.) that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article

## References

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