

**Editorial****COVID-19 in Bangladesh: Measures for Containment**Rahman SMM<sup>1\*</sup>, Hossain SM<sup>2</sup>, Jahan MU<sup>3</sup>*<sup>1</sup>Institute of Public Health, Dhaka, Bangladesh; <sup>2</sup>Former Director General of Health Services, Dhaka, Bangladesh; <sup>3</sup>Bangladesh Medical Research Council, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered novel coronavirus, renamed as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2).<sup>1</sup> It was unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.<sup>2</sup> The outbreak was linked epidemiologically to the Hua Nan seafood and wet animal wholesale market in Wuhan, and the market was subsequently closed on 1 January 2020.<sup>3</sup> The virus rapidly spread to all provinces in China, as well as a number of countries overseas, and was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the Director General of the World Health Organization on 30 January 2020.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, on 11 March 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic.<sup>5</sup> It is the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus.<sup>6</sup>

Around the globe, hundreds of thousands have been infected and tens of thousands people died including frontline workforce including physicians, nurses and others. Bangladesh reported its first confirmed COVID-19 case on 8 March 2020, after three people, two men and a woman tested positive for the coronavirus. Two of the infected are recently returned from Italy, and the other one is a female family member of the infected male. On the 18 March, 2020, Bangladesh confirmed the first death from COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> In Bangladesh, till 30 March 2020, 49 confirmed cases and there were five deaths due to COVID-19.<sup>8</sup>

This pandemic-a global calamity, is not only a health concern, it is a threat to life and livelihoods worldwide. In addition to health, major disruptions are also occurred in business, education, transport and other areas. It causes interruption in every aspect of day to day life.

To prevent and control infections, the immediate challenges ahead are to conduct the tests, isolation of infected cases, tracing of the contacts and quarantine, and appropriate measures for the overseas returnees. An effective risk communication with community engagement is critical to reduce the stigma, fake news, psychological stress. It is essential to bring courage

and mental strength of the frontline fighters, and support for the poor and daily wage earners etc.

Aimed at preventing and control of SARS-COV-2, government of Bangladesh has already initiated steps including enhancement of public awareness on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, social distancing, wearing of masks, avoidance of public gatherings, campaign against myths, fake news and stigma; preparing the health care services including expansion of hospital facilities, training and protective measures for the health workforce and other frontline fighters. Furthermore, steps are being taken conducting RT PCR tests, isolating infected cases, tracing contacts, quarantine the contacts and overseas returnees, and other necessary measures. The government has declared the general holiday in Bangladesh including closure of the educational institutes, and offices and workplaces, to prevent and control of infections. Necessary steps have been initiated for the social and economic protections of the vulnerable including expansion of the existing social safety net programmes. Aimed at adequate and timely response to the COVID-19, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, developed a number of guidelines and manuals for the containment of this pandemic disease. For an effective and timely preparedness and response, the DGHS has developed 'National Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19, Bangladesh'.<sup>9</sup>

For better response, well-coordinated and cooperated global efforts, including exchange of information, scientific knowledge, research findings, expertise and best practices are important. All countries should implement WHO guidelines and recommendations.

In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare alone cannot mitigate this pandemic. Strengthening of the coordinated efforts among the ministries, and effective and timely engagement of the non-government and private sectors are strongly recommended. Intensification of RT-PCR lab tests for case detection, and isolation and management of cases, and to trace the contacts and

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ensure quarantine, surveillance, and research, serological tests to detect SARS-CoV-2 specific immunoglobulins (IgG and IgM) to estimate the population exposure, strengthening public awareness and risk communication, strict implementation of personal hygiene, use of face mask, social distancing and other measures are thus suggested to prevent and control COVID-19 in Bangladesh.

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