

COVID-19 Weekly Situation Report

| # of Countries Reporting Cases | New Cases Reported in the Week | New Deaths Reported in the Week | Total Cases Reported | Total Deaths Reported |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 10 out of 11 | 167 809 | 2 131 | 13 691 395 | 210 346 |

Highlights

- Globally there has been a 4% decrease of new cases between epidemiological weeks 8 and 9. Except for the European Region (6% increase) and Eastern Mediterranean Region (10.4% increase) all other WHO Regions reported a decline of new cases
- South-East Asia Region (SEAR) remains the third most affected WHO Region (n=13.7 million cases), after the Americas Region (n=51.5 million cases) and European Region (n=39.8 million cases). Between week 8 and 9, there has been a 2.4% decrease of new cases reported in SEAR, with only India and Bangladesh reporting an increase of new cases
- Four SEAR countries received COVAX-allocated vaccines this week: Indonesia, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. To date, 36 million doses of COVID 19 vaccine have been given in eight countries in SEAR

Overview of situation (epidemiological week #9 for period between 01 – 07 March 2021)

- Bangladesh and Indonesia continue to report 'community transmission'; India, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Timor Leste (since last week) are reporting 'clusters of cases'. Bhutan is reporting 'sporadic cases' and DPR Korea continues to report 'no cases'
- In Myanmar, the political situation since 1 February 2021 continues to hamper detection and testing capacity. During January 2021, the daily average number of tests and new cases reported were 18 680 and 500 respectively, which decreased to a daily average of 3 594 tests and 62 new cases reported in February 2021, and further decreased to 1,637 daily tests and 19 new cases reported in the first week of March 2021
- India continues to report increasing numbers of new cases for the third consecutive week. Between epidemiological weeks 8 and 9, there has been an 8.6% increase (n=114 068) of new cases. Six states - Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu collectively account for 85% of new cases reported during the week. Other states such as Delhi, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh are showing recent surges of cases
- Bangladesh is reporting increasing trend of new cases since week 6. Between weeks 8 and 9, there is a 43.6% increase of new cases. Most of the new cases during week 9 (n=4 114) were reported in Dhaka (72%, n=2 965) and Chattogram (20%, n=846) divisions of the country
- Maldives has been reporting a recent surge of cases since week 4, but there has been a marginal decrease (2%) of new cases between weeks 8 and 9. Majority of the cases continue to be reported in Greater Male Region
- Thailand has shown a declining trend of new cases since week 4. Between weeks 8 and 9 there has been a 21.8% decrease in new cases. Majority (~60%) of the new cases during week 9 were detected in Samut Sakhon
- Indonesia continues to show a declining trend since week 7. Between weeks 8 and 9, there has been a 19.6% decrease of new cases. The nationwide Test Positivity Rate (TPR) continues to decline but still high at 19.9%
- Sri Lanka has reported a decline of cases for three consecutive weeks with a 24% decline of new cases between weeks 8 and 9. Most of the new cases continue to be concentrated in the Western Province, but there is a notable upsurge of new cases during the week in provinces adjoining the Western Province namely Kandy, Ratnapura, Kurunegala, Kegalle, Matara, Puttlam, Kalmunai, Badulla and Galle
- Timor-Leste has reported a recent surge of cases since 28 February 2021, due to clusters of cases reported in Covalima municipality bordering Indonesia

- WHO SEARO, in collaboration with WHO Country offices continues to monitor the detection and reporting of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concerns (Table 1)

Table1: SARS CoV2 Variants of Concern (VOC) reported in SEAR as of 08 March 2021

| SARS CoV2- Variants of Concern | Countries reporting in SEAR |
|---------------------------------|---|
| VOC 202012/01 (UK Variant) | Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand |
| 501Y.V2 (South African variant) | India and Thailand |
| P.1 (Brazil Variant) | India |

Summary of published Seroprevalence studies in SEAR:

So far, 2 countries in SEAR have published seroprevalence studies including India (n=35) and Thailand (n=1). Other countries in the region (e.g., Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Nepal) have conducted seroprevalence studies but results are still awaited.

As per available information at SEARO, studies started as early as April 2020 and were being conducted up until December 2020. Targeted populations ranged from hospital settings, slums, city, district, states to nationwide with sample sizes ranging from 244 health care workers to around 29 000 samples from households at the community level.

SARS CoV2-related seroprevalence data in SEAR are compiled from online sources into a list that can be accessed at "[published seroprevalence studies](#)". Please note that this is ongoing work, and that the list is non-exhaustive

Figure 1: Reported COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in SEAR from 1 January 2020 to 07 March 2021

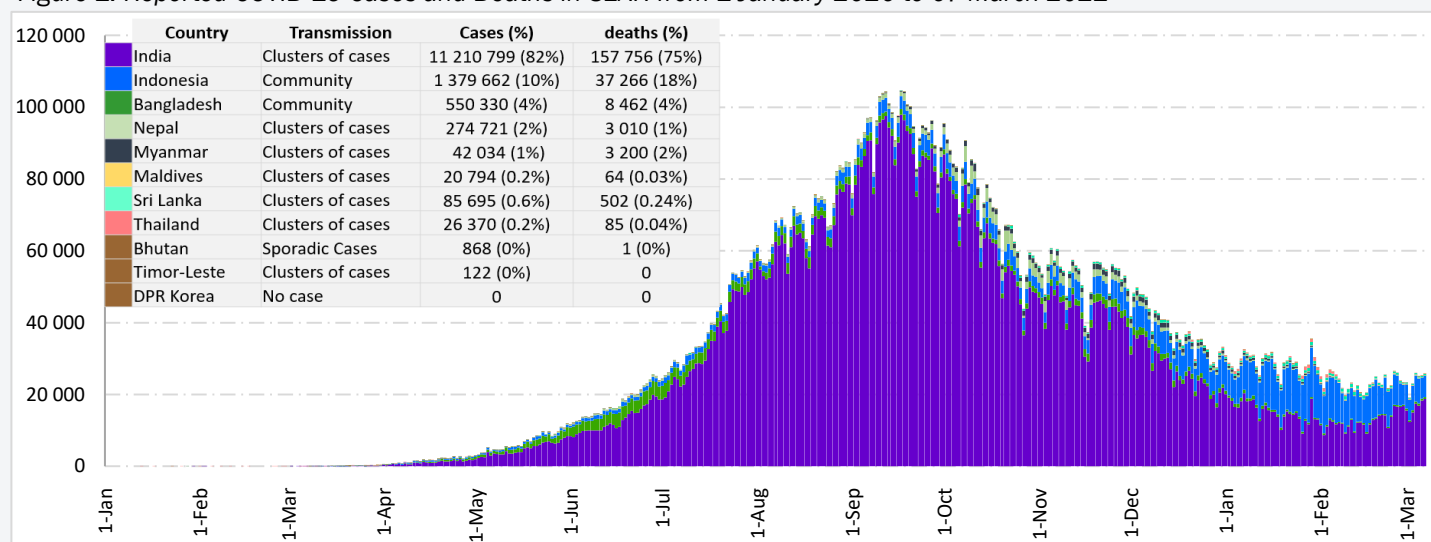


Table 2: Regional COVID-19 Situation (07 March 2021)

| Country | Total cases | Total cases per 1 million pop | Total deaths | CFR | New cases (last 7 days) | % change in new cases* | TPR (last 7 DMA) |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|----------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| India | 11 210 799 | 8 124 | 157 756 | 1.4 | 114 068 | 8.6 | 2.3 |
| Indonesia | 1 379 662 | 5 044 | 37 266 | 2.7 | 45 028 | -19.6 | 19.9 |
| Bangladesh | 550 330 | 3 342 | 8 462 | 1.5 | 4 114 | 43.6 | 3.9 |
| Nepal | 274 721 | 9 429 | 3 010 | 1.1 | 578 | -18.8 | 1.9 |
| Myanmar | 142 034 | 2 610 | 3 200 | 2.3 | 138 | -5.5 | 1.4 |
| Sri Lanka | 85 695 | 4 002 | 502 | 0.6 | 2 453 | -24.4 | 3.0 |
| Maldives | 20 794 | 38 469 | 64 | 0.3 | 1 001 | -2.2 | 3.5 |
| Thailand | 26 370 | 378 | 85 | 0.3 | 419 | -21.8 | 1.7 |
| Bhutan | 868 | 1 125 | 1 | 0.1 | 1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Timor-Leste | 122 | 93 | | 0.0 | 9 | -10.0 | 2.1 |
| DPR Korea | 0 | | | | | | |
| SEAR total | 13 691 395 | 6 773 | 210 346 | - | 167 809 | -1.1 | - |

*Percent change in the number of newly confirmed cases/deaths in past seven days, compared to seven days prior.

CFR=Case Fatality Rate; DMA= Day Moving Average; TPR=Test Positivity Rate

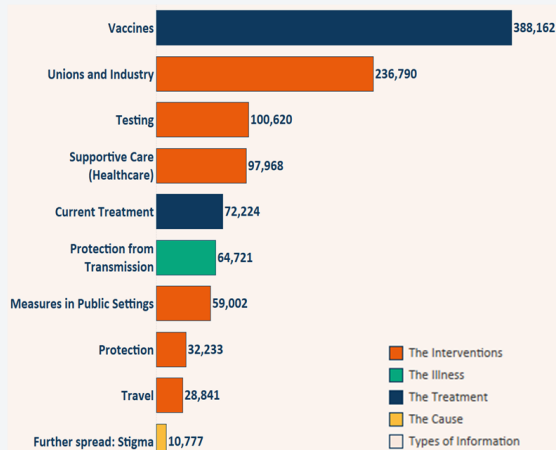
Key operational updates

Risk communication and community engagement:

- The SEARO weekly infodemic intelligence for public concerns around COVID-19 revealed that vaccines continue to dominate the conversation with nearly 390 000 mentions, followed by unions and industry and testing; the topics that gained velocity last week included conversations on non-proven treatment in the context of nutrition; personal measures and immunity – all of which increased in conversation volume by more than 200%. Healthcare increased in volume by 105%
- SEARO is working with UNICEF to address concerns and create awareness around COVID-19 vaccines

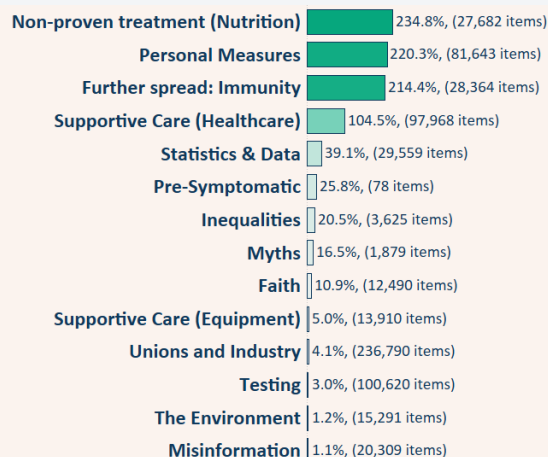
Top 10 topics by volume

Social media mentions of selected categories per taxonomy



Top rising topics

Based on % change of conversation volume from the previous week



1 – 7 MARCH 2021

Resource mobilization:

- The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has announced the funding opportunity CDC-RFA-IP21-2101: Surveillance and Response to Avian and Pandemic Influenza by National Health Authorities outside the United States to support as low- and middle-income countries (WB classification) on routine influenza surveillance and capacity development
- SEARO will be supporting Member States in this effort to mobilize resources for surveillance and response to Avian and Pandemic Influenza

Operation support and logistics:

- With the support from WHO Headquarters, SEARO is facilitating urgent requests from Nepal for 150 Wantai ELISA kits for second round of seroprevalence study planned in third week of March 2021
- WHO SEARO conducted a needs assessment through WHO Country Offices in the Region for urgent requirement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) from Member States and will provide PPE support from the regional strategic stockpile to countries
- WHO SEARO shipped 50 sets of WHO deployment bags for field officers at country level in response to COVID-19 which contain essential field items such as WHO shirts, insulated water bottles, umbrellas etc to WCO Bhutan and Nepal from Regional stockpiles

Cumulative list of COVID-19 essential supplies provided to SEAR countries, as of 11 March 2021

| Personal Protective Equipment | | Laboratory | | Bio-medical | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------|
| Mask 3 plies | 6 940 500 | Swab | 2 142 050 | Pulse Oximeter | 250 |
| Glove exam | 2 125 500 | Tests (Manual PCR) | 2 408 970 | Nasal Oxygen canula | 2 440 |
| Respirator | 604 495 | Extractions | 1 857 166 | Venturi Mask | 1 710 |
| Gown | 555 300 | RDT COVID-19 antigen test | 440 000 | Oxygen Mask | 1 000 |
| Face shield | 371 836 | Reactions | 6 000 | Oxygen concentrator | 769 |
| Goggles | 86 510 | | | Thermo-meter infrared | 110 |
| Apron disposable | 39 500 | | | Monitor | 106 |
| Bag biohazard | 30 000 | | | Ventilator | 13 |

Key country updates

Bangladesh:

- The Government has exempted value added tax (VAT) imposed on activities leading to preserving, marketing and distributing COVID-19 vaccine
- The Government announced the registration for COVID-19 vaccination for foreign nationals from 17 March 2021

Bhutan:

- MoH supported by WHO country office conducted the Intra Action Review (IAR) for COVID-19 response. Twenty-seven participants from the relevant national stakeholders engaged in COVID-19 response attended the three-day workshop. The conclusions of the review will be published shortly
- WHO Country Office supported training of trainers (ToT) to District Health Officers (DHO) and District Medical Officers (DMO) on vaccination of health workers in three different regions (Paro, Punakha and Mongar). DHO and DMO to provide cascade training to other health workers in district health centres

DPR Korea:

- No reported cases of COVID-19 as of 04 March 2021
- Surveillance is ongoing, samples are being tested for COVID-19 in 15 laboratories including 13 sub-national laboratories

India:

- India has recorded a significant achievement in its countrywide COVID19 vaccination programme on 8 March 2021, as it administered more than 2 million vaccine doses in 24 hours
- Phase 3 results of the COVAXIN, developed by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in partnership with Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL), has shown an interim vaccine efficacy of 81% in preventing COVID-19
- The Empowered Group of COVID-19 Vaccination announced a new approach being adopted; it will now take a demand –driven rather than a supply driven approach which was adopted during the vaccination of healthcare workers and frontline workers
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) sent high level public health teams to Maharashtra and Punjab to assist in COVID-19 control and containment measures in view of recent spike in cases in these States

Indonesia:

- The Government of Indonesia received the first batch of 1.1 million doses of COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccines from the COVAX facility on 8 March 2021
- The General Elections Commission (EC) and Ministry of Health (MoH) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support the national COVID-19 vaccination campaign. Through the MoU, EC will provide access to the voter database to MoH, which will be used in the COVID-19 vaccination plan
- The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced the mobilization of 80 000 to 100 000 staff to improve contact tracing efforts in Indonesia

Maldives:

- The Government has initiated vaccination for undocumented migrants in Maldives free of cost on registering with Maldives Red Crescent (MRC). Over 1 490 undocumented migrants are registered, and more than 156 migrant workers received vaccine as of 10 March 2021
- The Health Protection Agency (HPA) and Election Commission of Maldives discussed guidelines and recommendations to hold safe Local Council Elections planned in April 2021
- WHO country office handed over laboratory and cold chain equipment to Maldives Ministry of Health to strengthen pandemic response

Myanmar:

- The Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) released a note to the public stating its work to prioritize the availability of quality and safe vaccines for COVID-19 prevention in the country
- Of the 3.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine received by the country, only around 1.5 million doses have so far been distributed to Nay Pyi Taw Council, States and Regions for vaccination of frontline health workers

Nepal:

- The Government of Nepal received the first batch of 348 000 doses of COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccines from the COVAX facility along with 350 000 syringes and 3 500 vaccine safety boxes on 7 March 2021
- The Government of Nepal started second priority list for first phase COVID-19 vaccination campaign targeted to the elderly population above 65 years of age
- The Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) organized a webinar on 'Science behind COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination campaign in Nepal for media persons' supported by WHO country office and hosted live on MoHP facebook page
- The joint review and assessment of oxygen status and critical care equipment of health facilities with ICU (hub and satellite hospitals) at provincial level was completed on 6 March 2021. The assessment report is under review and finalization

Sri Lanka:

- The Government of Sri Lanka received the first batch of 264 000 doses of COVID 19 vaccines from the COVAX facility on 7 March 2021
- The Ministry of Health (MoH) released the revised guidelines and SoP on management of COVID-19 related deaths, including burial
- The National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA) approved the Sputnik V vaccine for emergency use in Sri Lanka

Thailand:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed the implementation of a vaccine passport. At present, there are no international guidelines on this issue. In the meantime, Thailand to issue a vaccine certificate for those who wish to travel abroad and have been inoculated in Thailand at additional cost.
- The Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) discussed the relaxation of quarantine rules for vaccinated foreign tourists for top tourist destinations such as Phuket and Krabi

Timor-Leste

- Around 26 cases were detected in capital city Dilli through mass screening linked to Baucau municipality cluster
- In the wake of increasing number of cases in Dili, the Government through the Council of Ministers extraordinary meeting has placed a sanitary health fence and confinement to contain any further transmission of COVID-19
- The Government has approved the COVID-19 vaccine deployment plan in Timor-Leste

Strengthening Genome Sequencing Capacity in SEAR

According to “WHO’s interim guidance on SARS-CoV-2 genomic sequencing for public health goals” (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/338483>), the global surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 genetic sequences and related metadata contribute to an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Studying SARS-CoV-2 virus evolution and rapidly identifying genomic changes that could have an impact on viral properties (phenotypic change) are important tools for an effective response to the pandemic. Among the most important outcomes of such work is the detection of variants of concern (VoC). These variants of concern are associated with changes in the pathogenicity or transmissibility of the virus, disease severity or host immunity. They have the potential to reduce the effectiveness of medical countermeasures (diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics) (Please refer to the “WHO’S proposed working definitions of SARS-CoV-2 Variants of Interest and Variants of Concern” published on COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update on 25 February 2021)

While genetic sequencing has value on its own, the potentially high cost and volume of work required for genomic sequencing demands clarity about the expected returns from such investments by the health authorities. Such considerations are of course more acute in resource constrained settings. In these settings, WHO advocates for strategic testing and intelligent genome sequencing.

In WHO’s South East Asia Region (SEAR), the current genomic sequencing capacity in the public health sector is variable. Out of 11 countries of the SEAR, three countries have capacity to perform genome sequencing at their national public health laboratories, while four countries have capacities beyond designated national laboratories too (Research institutes, universities, and private laboratories contribute to this capacity in these countries). Remaining four countries of the SEAR do not have in-country sequencing capacity and have been supported by WHO’s South East Asia Regional Office (SEARO), in association with COVID-19 reference laboratories/WHO collaborating centres.

According to the “Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data” (GISAID) database, eight SEAR countries have submitted genome sequences of SARS-CoV-2 viruses to the GISAID database to date. A ninth SEAR country has performed genome sequencing, but results are yet to be submitted to the GISAID database. For countries that do not have in-country sequencing capacity, upon ad-hoc requests from national authorities, SEARO supports specimen referrals to international reference laboratories within and outside the region. By contrast, countries with existing sequencing capacity have been supported by their respective WHO country offices under COVID-19 country support when needed.

Even though most countries in SEAR have been able to perform genome sequencing, a regional systematic approach to unveil meaningful information with a view to understanding transmission dynamics of the pandemic, changes in severity of the disease manifestation, and impact on medical counter measures including diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics, with linkages to epidemiology and clinical information, is still lacking. In this context, WHE-SEARO has proposed an initiative to identifying and immediately respond to short term needs of genome sequencing in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, and ii), in the midterm, to strengthen, in a sustainable manner, the genome sequencing capacity of regional laboratories for emerging and re-emerging infections in SEAR countries.

The operationalization of the initiative consists of short-term activities (predominantly focusing on SARS CoV-2 for 2021) and long-term activities (with the focus on influenza and other high threat pathogens for the next 2-3 years). The short-term and long-term activities will include, but not limited to, developing country level plans, mapping of in-country sequencing facilities, identifying centers of excellence for genome sequencing and bioinformatics in the region, trainings, mentorships, technical assistance, quality assurance, specimen referrals and advocacy support for country level coordination with relevant epidemiological units. The strengthening activities will be aligned with WHO interim guidance documents on genome sequencing: SARS-CoV-2 genomic sequencing for public health goals, *Genomic sequencing of SARS-CoV-2: a guide to implementation for maximum impact on public health* (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/338480>) and *Operational considerations to expedite genomic sequencing component of GISRS surveillance of SARS-CoV-2* (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/339676>)

As first step, a mapping exercise will be conducted to collect immediate needs of countries followed by a more in-depth analysis to identify long-term needs. Country specific virtual meetings with stakeholders including national laboratories to discuss and finalize national genome sequencing strengthening plans and their operationalization (timelines, etc) will follow. Collaborations with selected center/centers of excellence in genomics within the region, thus contributing to WHO's mandate for south-south cooperation, will be sought for operationalizing the initiative. To address short term and urgent needs in the context of the ongoing pandemic, the initiative contemplates the identification of high priority activities pertaining to genome sequence strengthening on an ad-hoc basis in parallel to addressing medium term needs through system building efforts. Additionally, the expertise available within WHO, centers of excellence, including those in universities and the private sector within and outside WHO's SEAR virus evolution working group (VEWG) and technical support of designated reference laboratories will be mobilized as required. The developments will be shared on SEARO's weekly situational reports.

Parallel to these activities, countries will be encouraged to strengthen surveillance for detecting unusual events indicative of phenotypic changes of the virus in circulation, set up genomic surveillance mechanisms within national surveillance networks, establish criteria for identifying signals that call for investigations including laboratory diagnosis and genome sequencing based on surveillance findings, and develop protocols for reporting new potential variants of interest and concern to WHO.

Though the current global focus is on genomic surveillance and sequencing in the context of the ongoing pandemic, WHE-SEARO aims to capitalize on these efforts and promote a more systematic approach towards a sustainable genome sequencing and analytical and bio-informatic capacity for characterization of other emerging and reemerging high threat pathogens.

Update on the Public Health and Social Measures (02 - 09 March 2021)

| Member State | Stay at Home | Public transport (Inter province movement) | School measures | Public gathering | Mask use |
|--|---|--|--|--|-----------|
| Bangladesh | None | Resumed | | Ban | Mandatory |
| Bhutan | None | Resumed | | Ban >25 | Mandatory |
| DPR Korea | None | Restricted* (Capital to provinces and inter-province movement restricted) | | Ban > 5 | Mandatory |
| India | Partial (Movement restricted in containment zones; Restrictions including night curfews in some areas) | Resumed* (Operational hours limited in areas under curfew) | (Schools reopened for some /all grades in most areas) | Allowed (States to decide on requirements for gatherings; gatherings banned in Maharashtra) | Mandatory |
| Indonesia | Partial (Implementation of micro-level restrictions on community activities (neighbourhood/ward) in Java and Bali) | Restricted* | (Vary across provinces) | (Vary across provinces) | Mandatory |
| Maldives (Emergency extended until 04 April 2021) | Partial (Curfew from 2300 to 0430 hrs. at Greater Male Region) | Restricted* (Vehicle movement banned between 2030 to 0430 hrs.) | (Pre-school and day care centres closed) | Ban > 10 | Mandatory |
| Myanmar | Partial (Curfew imposed from 0200 to 0400 hrs.) | Restricted* | | Ban > 5 | Mandatory |
| Nepal | None | Resumed | | Allowed | Mandatory |
| Sri Lanka | Partial (Restrictions imposed in a few small areas) | Resumed | (Schools reopened across the country except in Western Province) | Ban > 10 | Mandatory |
| Thailand (Emergency extended until 31 March 2021) | None | Resumed | | Allowed | Mandatory |
| Timor-Leste (Emergency extended until 2 April 2021) | Partial (Stay-at-home orders at Dili) | Resumed* | (Closed at Dili) | Ban | Mandatory |
| * Public transport allowed with limited capacity, limited timings and/or limited routes – variations at Sub National level | | | | | |
| Red icons | Complete restriction (applied to all or most areas or populations nationwide) | | | Bus, taxi/ private vehicle, Train | |
| Yellow icons | Partial restrictions (targeted to some areas or populations) | | | Waterways- boat | |
| Green icons | No restrictions | | | Airways | |

Update on Pandemic Vaccine Deployment

- Ongoing support to countries to receive the vaccine allocated by COVAX facility including completing cold chain expansion application, and addressing the gaps identified during the regional review of National Deployment and Vaccination plans (NDVPs).
- UNICEF Supply & Logistics workstream discussion and recent update on Cold Chain Expansion (CCE) application from SEAR Member States - seven countries have applied for CCE. Independent Review Committee completed review of Nepal application and completed prereview of Bhutan and Timor-Leste applications
- Fourth meeting of the Regional Working Group (RWG) for Immunization, subgroup on COVID 19 vaccine, was conducted on 9 March 2021. The main outcomes of the discussions were:
 - Partners to continue to provide support to countries to develop budget, identify and meet budget gaps
 - Sharing information on confirmed and potential financial support from partners to RWG
 - Further streamlining communications related to amount of vaccine allocated and shipment dates with Regional Offices
 - Follow up countries on spacing between doses based on the availability of Astra Zeneca vaccine through different sources to reach maximum population coverage? early
 - Support countries to update NDVPs based on the recommendations of Regional Review Committee (RRC)
- Ongoing collection, compilation and analysis of weekly COVID-19 vaccination data
- The following table is a summary of COVID-19 vaccination status in SEAR countries as of 11 March 2021:

| Country | Start date | Vaccine name | Last update | Total doses administered* | Persons vaccinated with one dose | Persons vaccinated with two doses | Source |
|--------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Bangladesh | 27-Jan-21 | COVISHIELD | 10 Mar 2021 | 4 11 8953 | 4 11 8953 | | As per GOVT. Report |
| India | 16-Jan-21 | COVISHIELD/COVAXIN | 10 Mar 2021 | 25 289 693 | 20 730 168 | 4 559 525 | https://pib.gov.in/PressRelease |
| Indonesia | 13-Jan-21 | CORONAVAC | 10 Mar 2021 | 4 837 576 | 3 574 698 | 1 262 878 | https://www.kemkes.go.id/ |
| Maldives | 01 Feb 21 | COVISHIELD | 10 Mar 2021 | 175 456 | 175 456 | | HPA COVID 19 update group |
| Myanmar | 27-Jan-21 | COVISHIELD | 04 Feb 2021 | 104 865 | 104 865 | | WHO Country Office |
| Nepal | 27-Jan-21 | COVISHIELD | 10 Mar 2021 | 1 256 841 | 1 256 841 | | FWD. MoHP Nepal |
| Sri Lanka | 29-Jan-21 | COVISHIELD | 09 Mar 2021 | 743 775 | 743 775 | | Epidemiology unit, MoH |
| Thailand | 28-Feb-21 | CORONAVAC | 04 Mar 2021 | 17 697 | 17 697 | | WHO Country Office |
| SEARO | | | | 36 544 856 | 30 722 453 | 5 822 403 | |

Note: India data for one dose and two doses sourced from <https://dashboard.cowin.gov.in/> COWIN dashboard, MoHFW