

KU lecture: Top Kashmir doctor advises against lowering Covid-19 guard amid vaccine rollouts

Prof Talat inaugurates 2-week refresher course in science

Srinagar, Jan 2: A top Kashmir doctor on Saturday cautioned the public over any lowering of guard against the Coronavirus pandemic despite the rollout of vaccines. Addressing as lead speaker the inaugural session of a two-week refresher course, organised by the Kashmir University's UGC-HRDC, Prof Parvaiz Koul, Head of the Internal and Pulmonary Medicine Department at Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Srinagar, said: "At this point, I would not advise that you get rid of social distancing norms or other Covid-appropriate behavior that we have gotten used to. These measures have to run parallel to the vaccination rollouts".

Prof Koul was answering a question whether people can do away with masks and social distancing measures while the vaccination programmes have been launched in many countries.

"At this point, the vaccination is being prioritised. The final rollout is going to take a year and a half. It's after that we can think of doing away with masks and social distancing measures. But at this stage, it's not advisable."

The two-week refresher course for university and college teachers was inaugurated by Vice-Chancellor Prof Talat Ahmad, while Registrar Dr Nisar Ahmad Mir was a guest of honour on the occasion.

Prof Koul said the pandemic outlook of the Coronavirus is likely to get over with vaccination and the fact that herd immunity is going to step in.

"So people would be mostly non-susceptible to the virus. But nonetheless, the virus is likely to stay because it has disseminated so widely across the globe that its complete eradication may not be possible. It may, however, stay in low-level endemic form, but the pandemic form is going to be taken care of by the vaccination and consequent stepping in of the herd immunity." Prof Koul said the existing vaccines against Coronavirus are believed to be effective against its new variant found in the UK. "As of now, there's no data to suggest vaccines would not be effective. Currently, the knowledge is that the vaccine is effective against variant viruses as well. It is a different thing that any subsequent mutations might influence the virus efficacy. But that's not the case with the new UK variant," he said.

On the possibility of rollout of foreign vaccines in India, Prof Koul said there were logistical issues in inoculating such vaccines to 1.4 billion people. "There are storage and transportation issues which make such a thing inconceivable even in some developed economies, not to talk of developing or under-developed economies. Some vaccines have to be stored and transported at minus 70 degrees, which is not possible in developing or under-developed economies. Then the cost factor is also a deterrent, apart from the fact that such vaccines have not been tested on humans in this country," he said.

Apart from deliberating on a host of critical issues concerning Covid-19 and its vaccination, Prof Koul talked at length about the emergence of the virus, its transmissibility, symptom progression, complications in young and old, to-date status of vaccines being rolled out, their development and efficacy.

In-charge Director UGC-HRDC Prof Mushtaq A Darzi delineated aims and objectives of the refresher course while Coordinator UGC-HRDC Dr Geer Mohammad Ishaq conducted proceedings of the event. Coronavirus and its vaccination was a lead topic for the inaugural session, alongside another lead lecture on 'Particulate Pollution in Kashmir Valley' delivered by Prof Shakil A Romshoo, Dean Research, University of Kashmir.