

Zero Covid policy of China

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Why in news?

- Since the initial outbreak in 2019 in Wuhan, China, the world has seen multiple repeated waves of COVID-19 infections over the past few years.
 - This was largely driven by the emerging variants of concern (VOCs) of the causative virus, SARS-CoV-2.

- However, until recently, China remained successful in containing the spread of the disease owing to its zealous “**zero-COVID**” policy.
- As a result of the abrupt lifting of the policy, the country is now facing a surge of COVID-19 cases.

What is Zero-COVID policy?

- The policy involves complete control and maximum suppression for the elimination of the virus by using aggressive public health measures, such as contact-tracing, social isolation, mass testing, and lockdowns.
- Under this policy, Chinese cities are directed to impose stringent lockdowns and follow strict measures of social isolation even if only a small number of cases are reported.
- The objective of the strategy is to ensure there are no new infections and the virus is eliminated so that the nation can resume its usual social and economic affairs.

How does the Zero-COVID policy work?

- Dynamic-zero is two-pronged – prevention and containment.
- **Prevention**
 - Prevention focuses on early detection through regular PCR tests, especially in cities, where a recent negative result can be a requirement to enter a business or public facility.
 - Potential or suspected cases are isolated at home or placed under quarantine at a government-supervised facility.
- **Control**
 - Control tactics, aimed at swiftly cutting off transmission chains to forestall outbreaks, involve quarantining cases at government-supervised facilities and locking down buildings, communities or even entire cities.
 - Since March 2020, China’s borders have remained shut to most visitors.
 - Arrivals of all nationalities are subject to seven days of quarantine at a facility and three days of home isolation.

What were the impacts of such policy?

- To eliminate the virus, draconian measures were getting implemented such as separating families after testing positive and placing people in isolation.
- These measures created emotional turmoil among the general public as post-separation.
- The essential medical treatments were not prompt due to administrative flaws. This extended the period of separation.
- This strategy seems to have failed due to evolving nature of the virus. With new coronavirus variants becoming more transmissible, complete elimination is impossible and hence the zero Covid policy falls short

to achieve its goal.

- Also, the initial success of this policy made the authorities relaxed which in turn led to under-vaccination of masses and under-prepared medical infrastructure.
- In other words, the zero Covid policy has now become a victim of its success.

News Summary

- Currently, China is witnessing a surge of COVID-19 cases. The highly transmissible BF.7 strain of the Omicron variant seems to be behind the latest surge in Covid infections.
- China, Japan, South Korea, US and Brazil have seen a spike in cases. Four cases of Omicron sub-variant BF.7 have been detected in India so far.

What is BF.7 variant?

- BF.7 is an abbreviated form for BA.5.2.1.7. It is a sub-lineage of the Omicron variant BA.5 and is highly transmissible.
- The variant is also referred to as Omicron Spawn.
- It has an R-value of 10-18. This means an infected person can transmit the virus to an average of 10 to 18 other people. The Omicron variant had an R-value of 1-5.

Can India avoid the current wave caused by the BF.7 variant?

- Due to its Covid-zero policy, China has not faced waves of infections like India. The three waves witnessed in India naturally immunised millions of people.
 - The Chinese population has not been exposed to natural infection and the authorities did not use the time to vaccinate the elderly.
- According to experts, most Indians have acquired hybrid immunity, which means immunity developed through vaccines and also natural infection protecting them from different Covid variants.
- BF.7 is a sub-variant of Omicron and most of its symptoms are similar. The third wave in India mostly saw Omicron cases and a vast majority of the population has been naturally immunised against the virus.
- In India the vaccination coverage is very high.
 - India's vaccination rates are nearly 95% of eligible population for at least one dose, and over 88% for both doses.
 - A section of the eligible population has also received a third dose.
- The efficacy of domestically-made vaccines used in India have been widely acknowledged and the majority of the population can be presumed to be well protected.
 - This contrasts sharply with China, that has used 7 vaccines so far for its mass inoculation such as Sinovac and Sinopharm.

- The protection these vaccines provide are suspect, only two of the 7 are WHO-listed.
 - Hence, experts believe that India is unlikely to see a fourth wave.
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Q1) What is Zero COVID policy?

The zero Covid policy involves complete control and maximum suppression for the elimination of the virus by using aggressive public health measures, such as contact-tracing, social isolation, mass testing, and lockdowns.

Q2) What is R value?

The R number is a way of rating coronavirus or any disease's ability to spread. R is the number of people that one infected person will pass on a virus to, on average.

Source: [Explained | The emerging Omicron sublineages across the world](#) | [Time of India](#) | [Economic Times](#)

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/zero-covid-policy-of-china/>

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