

# Strategic Government Role in Uttar Pradesh, India's Management of the Covid-19 Pandemic: Part 2 (The Second Wave 2021)



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## Abstract

In the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, the Uttar Pradesh government (headed by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath) faced some very difficult public health issues, particularly in terms of offsetting scarcity of health care materials like oxygen cylinders, lack of sufficient COVID-19 wards for accommodating the huge number of hospitalizations, containment and prevention of further spread of the deadly B.1.617 variant or Delta variant COVID-19 infection in this heavily populated state. In this opinion piece, the successful, strategic management of severe second COVID-19 wave (that occurred in 2021) by the Uttar Pradesh government has been presented.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 second wave; COVID-19 management; COVID-19 containment; COVID-19 contact tracing; B.1.617 variant

**Abbreviations:** WHO: World Health Organization; RAT: Rapid Antigen Tests

## Opinion

In the year 2021, from March to May, the state of Uttar Pradesh in India was the second most heavily affected one with huge numbers of hospitalizations and deaths. The increase in the number of COVID-19 infections was observed from the end of March to April 2021. The highest single day figure recorded in India was 414,433 on May 6, 2021 [1]. This was the biggest single day surge documented in the nation and is considered to have been the peak of the second COVID-19 wave in India [1,2]. There were huge numbers of infection-related deaths in many states unlike the low number of fatalities recorded during the first wave. In Uttar Pradesh alone, the number of deaths recorded in this severe second COVID-19 wave was 1,453,679 [1,2]. At the time, India accounted for almost 15% of the entire number of COVID-19 infections in the world [2].

In Uttar Pradesh, unlike the first wave wherein the Central government placed a timely nation-wide lock down, the lockdown, prevention, management as well as all other public aspects became the responsibility of the Uttar Pradesh state government. This severe increase in active number of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and the high numbers of associated deaths were

the direct results of the violation of the strict COVID-19 norms that help in controlling the transmission and management of active COVID-19 cases. The general public became complacent and no longer observed COVID-19 gold standard practices like observing social distancing, regularly sanitizing hands, irregular use of effective masks and to some degree, the opening up of markets, eateries and social gathering venues.

Furthermore, the carrying out of events of mass gatherings like religious festivals, elections and marriage or other social events with uncontrolled participation together with the flagrant violation of COVID-19 safety norms contributed to the very high transmission, hospitalization and fatality rates during this second wave in 2021 [3,4]. In addition to these issues, the COVID-19 virus strain mutated to the highly infectious B.1.617 variant or Delta variant with very severe epidemiology and symptoms that resulted in massive hospitalization. Another factor that contributed heavily was the issue of vaccine illiteracy among the vaccinated population who largely believed that being vaccinated meant that they are 100% protected from contracting the B.1.617 variant or Delta COVID-19 variant and no longer need to observe COVID-19 safety norms [4,5].

The Uttar Pradesh state government faced a gigantic task of not only bolstering up the severely strained health care infrastructure of the state, serious shortages of oxygen cylinders and the management of the dead crowding up the choked crematoriums of the state. The state government led by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath faced these challenges admirably by making provision of extra COVID-19 treatment wards, making adequate provision of sufficient oxygen supplies and other needed medical equipment within two weeks. The most serious issue which the Uttar Pradesh state government had to control amidst the second wave was the further transmission and increase in daily new COVID-19 case load. To this end, the state government made strategic and informed policy implementation that were appreciated by other state leaders, the central government and the (The World Health Organization, WHO) [2].

The Uttar Pradesh state government began a house-to-house active case tracing initiative for the unaware populations within rural segments of the state where the transmission was uncontrolled and the vaccination rate very low due to vaccine illiteracy and hesitancy coupled with false myths and poor awareness of COVID-19 facts. This initiative was carried out in conjunction with WHO staff for the quick containment of the rapid transmission of the mutated strains prevalent in India. The state healthcare workers tested individuals that exhibited COVID-19 symptoms using rapid isolation, swift education on COVID-19 home care or management and very vigilant contact tracing [2,6]. The Uttar Pradesh government teams successfully covered more than 97,942 villages in over 75 state districts within the short period of just (starting from 5th May 2021) in the country's India's most populated state having a population of over 231 million people [2,6]. Every individual rural COVID-19 monitoring team was made up of two staff members that carried out house-to-house visits in every rural settlement and provided rapid testing facilitated by Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT) kits. The COVID-19 positive individuals were rapidly isolated and provided with a healthcare kit and given relevant education on the correct control and management of their COVID-19 infection. Follow ups were made regularly to ensure compliance and diligent contact tracing and subsequent testing with the RT-PCR kit followed by quarantine measures was done by the designated rapid response team [2,6].

In another strategic effort, the Uttar Pradesh state government deployed two mobile vans to cater to every block in a state district (for purposes of rapid testing and sample collection to further bolster the initiatives being deployed within community health care centres. In total, during the second COVID-19 wave of 2021,

the Uttar Pradesh state government made use of 141,621 teams combined with as many as 21,242 supervisory staff belonging to the state's health department to ensure adequate coverage of every affected rural population. The WHO provided on ground support to the Uttar Pradesh government in terms of providing training as well as micro planning for this COVID-19 management initiative. There was also provision of monitoring in terms of WHO field officers who shared daily, real-time feedback with the state government officials. This was very helpful in making informed decisions on adaptation and change of the initiative for maintaining its effectiveness [2,6]. The WHO made the final reports.

The strategic control, management and handling initiative of the second wave of COVID-19 by the Uttar Pradesh state government was successful in the mitigation of high transmission rates in rural segments of the states as the rapid response teams provided testing, medical kits and awareness on correct protocols of quarantine, management and isolation in individual homes and hospitals even in remote areas. The population was also given correct education on the importance of COVID-19 vaccination and the benefits of following COVID-19 safety norms. The rapid as well as highly effective strategies of Uttar Pradesh state government led by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during the severe second COVID-19 wave experienced in 2021 in preventing transmission and fatalities in both urban and rural segments of this most heavily populated Indian state. The strategies and lessons learnt by this exemplary Uttar Pradesh state government COVID-19 management model can serve as a role model for other countries in the current ongoing fourth wave of COVID-19 being experienced in USA, UK, China and any other affected nations.

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