

One Love – For the IISc Health Center and COVID Committee!

In these strange times, even a slight cough or fever, has the potential to drive us into a frenzy, for it could mean that we may have caught the *you-know-what*! Self-quarantine at home is a relatively simple affair, but isolation in a hostel room, with its shared facilities and common areas is a different matter altogether. Therefore, after having been comfortably isolated at home for six long months, I was certainly apprehensive of returning to IISc. What if I get infected? Worse, what if I spread it to my fellow hostel mates or lab mates and friends? With this kind of anxiety in my mind, I entered my campus on a cold, rainy evening, a noticeable shift in temperature from my unbearably hot hometown, Delhi. My cab was stopped at the gate and as soon as I told the guards that I was a re-entry student, I was whisked off for sanitization and health check-up with an efficiency that pleasantly surprised me. The entire entry process, which worked like well-oiled machinery, barely took fifteen minutes and I was free to go to my hostel room. While in quarantine in my hostel room, I observed strict social distancing measures, took saline water gargles as a precautionary measure, and was mostly pre-occupied with cleaning six months' worth of collected dirt in my room.

With only a day left for me to join the lab, I started feeling extremely queasy, sick and cold. I put it down to a case of overeating mess food after eons. At the end of the day, however, I found that I had high fever. A sense of dread settled over me. Do I have the *you-know-what*? My rational self advised me that it was perhaps a normal fever due to the drastic change in weather, and additionally, I always have been unusually susceptible to throat infections. Should I report the matter to the IISc Health Center? After all, upon re-entry, I was told to report any signs of fever, cold, cough immediately. **Will I be exaggerating the matter by reporting it or will I be underestimating the ongoing pandemic by keeping it quiet?** If I do have the infection and even if I recover easily, I could potentially spread it to students in the hostel and in the lab.

This being my major concern pushed me to call the Health Center at night. While I was in a state of panic and already contemplating packing my bags to move into a more secure quarantine facility, the nurse at the Health Center turned out to be quite calm and composed. She patiently asked me to list out my symptoms and told me to take Paracetamol. In case my fever persisted, I was asked to call a doctor in the morning. That's all? I was glad that I made the call to the Health Center. It restored my peace of mind and I was finally able to relax a little. I think I immediately felt better thereafter. I had even informed my guide, who also reassured me that it would be best to keep the Health Center updated. I did wake up with a normal temperature in the morning. I also got a call from the Health Center to check up on me, early in the morning. Further, upon speaking to the doctor, I felt all my anxiety drop to nil.

On that same day, I was called by the Health Centre team who handed me a list of phone numbers for emergency purposes. Despite the fact that I had recovered from fever, I got another call from the on-duty doctor, who asked me to get the required tests done. In the next ten minutes, I received a call from the hostel manager, who informed me that food would be delivered to the hostel, and an email from the COVID committee, informing me of the same and also asking me not to worry. I was happy with the smooth functioning of the entire process.

With the fever abated, however, I was mulling over the decision to get the whole team involved. I was annoyed, to say the least, that a mild sore throat which hasn't even matured to a cough is stopping me from restarting my work in the lab. However, later in day, when I observed that my throat pain had persisted, I reconsidered. At least now I didn't have to worry about harboring the dreaded infection; I would know soon enough.

I did test negative and am happily getting reacquainted with the new life in campus, while restarting my research in the lab with aplomb, thanks to the IISc Health Center.

Now that I reflect upon the incident, I am truly amazed that a slight rise in body temperature and mild irritation of the throat led to the involvement of so many people! Pre-pandemic, I would have probably gone to the lab and continued my work. But in the era of the pandemic, you never know if your cough is just a cough or if your fever is just a fever, unless you get tested for it. There's no way to differentiate and even imagining the consequences of testing positive takes a toll on the mind and brings everything to a halt!

I decided to share my experience of communication with the Health Center for the benefit of anyone who, like me, is worried to death by a regular cough or fever. I commend the brilliant job done by the IISc authorities and the Health Center to help us return safely to our beloved campus and their extraordinary efforts in keeping us all safe! However ridiculous it sounds; I feel that it is best to update the Health Center even in case of a mild flu or fever. This will go a long way to help keep the hostel and campus safe and more importantly, bring down the anxiety of the student tremendously.