

## COVID-19 and My Life - Fear, Turmoil and Light at the end of the tunnel

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We all know that our country is experiencing a second wave of the pandemic that's more severe than the first wave. A combination of mutant variations (which are more contagious) and laxity on our part in following COVID appropriate behaviour is responsible for the surge that we are experiencing now. The pandemic has been tiring for us all, and we are fatigued, and every one of us wants to go back to the pre-pandemic life, but we need to pause and think - Is this over or yet to be over? We CANNOT afford to be fatigued because our collective behaviour is the only thing that'll decide how soon the pandemic ends. Doctors and other healthcare workers who got vaccinated have been tested positive too. Wearing a mask, social distancing, proper sanitization (NOT vaccines) are the most potent tools to fight the pandemic.

We must remember why following COVID appropriate behaviour is necessary. It is not only to protect ourselves from the virus but also to protect our beloved ones from this pandemic. Wearing a mask ensures that other people do not get infected if we are an asymptomatic carrier of the virus. COVID might not harm us much, but we might transmit it to someone who unfortunately won't survive the battle with COVID. COVID appropriate behaviour also ensures that the rate at which new cases appear is such that our healthcare workers and the system can handle them. They are the ones who are most affected by the pandemic. Healthcare workers are not trained to fight a pandemic, unlike soldiers who are trained to fight a war. Yet this is a battle they have been fighting for more than a year. Many of my childhood and close friends are nurses and essential workers. Most of them have multiple co-morbidities. Yet, they have been serving their duty like everyone else, even though they're scared. Every time they get quarantined, I'm afraid of losing a friend.

I contracted COVID in October 2020. It took me more than a month to test negative for the virus. I was hospitalized for a week in the isolation ward and spent a month in Home isolation. I did not build up any antibodies for the virus. I also have multiple medical conditions that are rare in our country. I have not been able to get care for those conditions since a year because of this pandemic. Millions of people have

many other health conditions that require constant/regular medical care and have not received that care because of the pandemic. Our healthcare system was overburdened even when there was no pandemic. With the pandemic, it's not just COVID patients who are dying. People are dying because of a lack of access to appropriate care because of the pandemic. The new variants are more dangerous to children as well. There are long-term effects of the disease as well, which are not yet fully understood. We might have forgotten this, but this pandemic is a threat to many people's lives and is impacting people in ways we don't fully understand.

For the past few weeks, we have been witnessing the rise in cases inside our campus. However, we are still reluctant in following COVID appropriate behaviour. I have seen people taking off their masks as soon as they enter the hostel. I have seen people walking to the Gymkhana from their hostels without a mask. I have seen people talking in hostel corridors and once in front of my room, in groups, without masks. It scares me, and honestly, it makes me sad because I thought we were intelligent enough to understand the implications of our behaviour.

Our decision to not wear a mask affects many other people whose lives are equally, if not more important, than our own life. It's my request to everyone to please wear a mask appropriately, and help our campus COVID team in managing the situation. The doctors, nurses, mess workers, etc., are all putting their lives at risk every day for us. We are intellectuals of the best institute in the country. We cannot afford to be ignorant. We must be aware of how our behaviour impacts the bigger picture. Being bored of the rules cannot be an excuse when the entire globe is going through a monumental crisis. The doctors, healthcare workers, essential workers, and other COVID management team personnel are the ones who are the most exhausted and who deserve a break. Let's not make their lives and their jobs more stressful by not doing our part when all that's required of us is to wear a mask correctly.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel and together we will see it soon!