

COVID-19 and Indian States: Spread localises in Economically Significant States

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Summary

India's lockdown has changed to a localised containment strategy through the identification of the 'Red', 'Orange' and 'Green' zones. The classification reveals more than two-fifth of India being virus-free and several states on way to becoming so. Around eight states, including the national capital Delhi, remain heavily infected. The prolongation of the pandemic in these economically significant states would affect national economic recovery and strain government resources.

India extended the nation-wide lockdown to control COVID-19 by another two weeks with effect from 4 May 2020. The containment strategy now will change to a focused and cluster-specific approach. Several restrictions continue to persist across the country. International and domestic flights, trains and inter-state bus services remain suspended, except those specifically permitted by the government. Schools and colleges remain closed, as do entertainment, shopping, social gatherings and religious congregations.

Across India, however, curbs are being gradually eased. The 'Green' zones, comprising districts without any fresh cases for three successive weeks till 3 May 2020, are allowed to resume practically all activities, except those prohibited nationally. States are required to ensure appropriate preventive measures, such as social distancing in public transport, in these zones. Some activities (for example, limited private transport and resumption of government offices) are also allowed in sensitive 'Red' zones that include districts with large number of confirmed cases. Relatively more easing (for example, taxi services) are allowed in the 'Orange' zones, which are between the 'Red' and 'Green' zones. Most stringent restrictions remain for the 'containment zones', which are the high incidence hot spots in the 'Red' and 'Orange' zones. The goal of the current strategy is to work towards converting the 'Red' and 'Orange' zones to the 'Green' zones over the next few weeks.

The classification of districts into various [zones](#), which is the context for implementing the current strategy, offers valuable insights on the pattern of the pandemic in India.

- *More than two-fifth of India is COVID-19 free. Out of 733 districts, 319 are in the 'Green' zones, while 284 and 130 districts are in the 'Orange' and 'Red' zones respectively. The 'Green' zone districts, accounting for around 43 per cent of total districts, are practically COVID-19 free, by definition. The 'Orange' and 'Red' zones comprise 39 per cent and 18 per cent of total districts respectively.*
- *Six states (Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim) and three Union Territories (Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep) are*

COVID-19 free. All districts in these states and the Union Territories are in the 'Green' zones.

- *Seven states (Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Odisha, Tripura and Uttarakhand) and two Union Territories (Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry) are on way to becoming COVID-19 free.* The 'Green' zone districts dominate these states and the Union Territories. All of Assam, Meghalaya, Puducherry and Tripura should go into the 'Green' zone soon as they do not have any 'Red' zones. Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand have only one 'Red' zone district each, while Odisha has three 'Red' zones out of its 30 districts.
- *Ten States (Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Telangana), while having large parts free of COVID-19, also have hot spots.* In all these states, the 'Green' and 'Orange' zones account for more than 80 per cent of total districts, making the shares of the former equal to, or higher than, the national share of 82 per cent. Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh have no 'Red' zone districts. The others have more 'Orange' zones than 'Green' zones, along with a few 'Red' zones. Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Bihar have more 'Red' zones than the others, requiring them to stay more vigilant.
- *Eight states (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) and the Union Territory of Chandigarh are highly affected with most hot spots.* These states have 80 'Red' zone districts out of 130 for the country. The national capital, Delhi, is the most critically affected with all of its 11 districts in the 'Red' zones. Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have the highest number of 'Red' zone districts – 19 and 14 respectively – followed by Tamil Nadu and West Bengal with 12 and 10 'Red' zones respectively. The other states have less than 10 'Red' zones, while Chandigarh's lone district is in the 'Red' zone. These states face the toughest challenge in curbing the pandemic.

The stratified strategy of containment is an attempt to spatially concentrate administrative, public health and financial resources according to local intensity of the disease. Instead of a broad-based policy, the focused containment approach should ensure better utilisation of scarce resources and enable several parts of India to economically revive. However, several major states continue to remain heavily infected. These are large states and significant contributors to the national economy. The prolongation of the pandemic in these states would affect the ability of the Indian economy to revive by deepening the damage inflicted on it. It would also severely stretch federal and state resources and test their administrative wherewithal.

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