



# Research and Advocacy Roadmap for Prevention and Control of Influenza and other Respiratory Viruses in India

## Executive Summary

Report of a National Stakeholder Meeting  
19 -22 April 2022



## **Background:**

Influenza is a viral respiratory infection that mainly affects the nose, throat, and bronchi and is preventable. Global estimates indicate that severe influenza is associated with over 600,000 respiratory deaths annually. The global annual attack rate of influenza is estimated at 5-10% in adults and 20-30% in children. Every year influenza causes annual outbreaks and results in substantial morbidity, mortality and economic burden across nations. Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic has brought further focus on threats from pandemic prone viruses like influenza, which has already caused four major pandemics in last 100 years. As the virus constantly mutates and evades our immune system, its evolution needs to be regularly monitored to inform vaccine compositions and detect emergence of any novel influenza virus.

Despite availability of diagnostics, effective antivirals and proven vaccines, influenza management, prevention and control in India is sub-optimal. To identify research and advocacy needs to inform public health policies related to influenza in India, a national level meeting was organized by the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi in collaboration with Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta. The meeting on “**Identifying a Research and Advocacy Roadmap for Prevention and Control of Influenza and other respiratory viruses in India**” was held from 19 to 22 April 2022 at New Delhi.

## **Aims and Objectives:**

The overall aim of the meeting was to initiate the formation of network of premier public health institutions of India to support evidence based clinical and public health approach for prevention and control of influenza and other respiratory viruses. It brought together clinicians, public health experts, virologists and other stakeholders to develop a comprehensive approach for dealing with problem of influenza and other respiratory viruses in the country. The key objectives were:

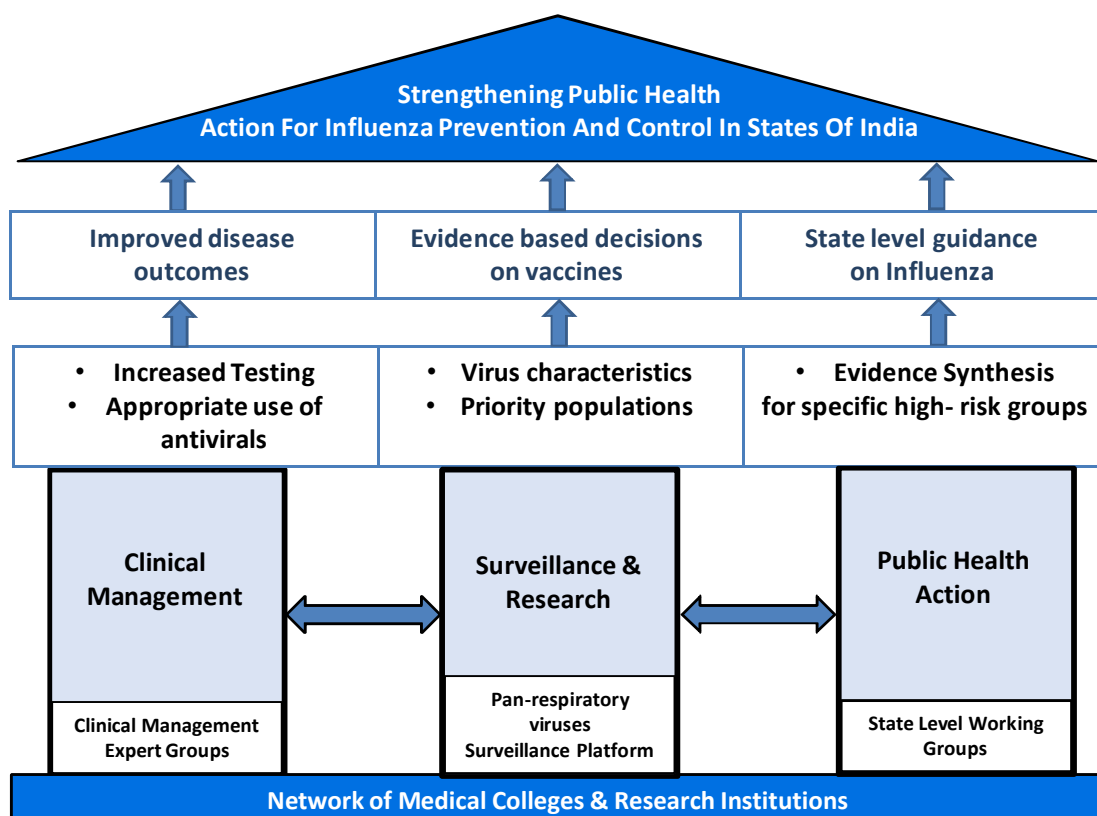
- 1) To identify a research and advocacy agenda for prevention and control of influenza and other respiratory viruses
- 2) To share experiences of the selected institutions in prevention and control of influenza and other respiratory viruses.
- 3) To discuss way forward for evidence based clinical management and public health advocacy for prevention and control of influenza and other respiratory viruses in India.

## Organization of the Meeting

Over sixty participants representing more than twenty-five institutions participated in deliberations. Apart from faculty of premier government medical colleges, there were participants from other organizations including Indian Council of Medical Research, World Health Organization and professional associations. The panel discussion, institutional presentations and domain specific group discussions enabled the participants to deliberate a range of issues. This helped to bring out the need for additional research in domains such as burden estimation, understanding the transmission and effectiveness of non-pharmacological interventions, drugs and vaccine delivery and effectiveness and vaccine hesitancy. The discussions also re-emphasized the importance of continued surveillance, community level data and appropriate standard treatment guidelines.

## Key recommendations and way forward:

- The participants of the meeting envisaged a network of medical colleges and research institutions in India to work towards the goal of providing appropriate guidance for framing guidelines and policies for prevention and control of influenza as well as other respiratory viruses among States of India.
- This network would undertake activities under three pillars of action for achieving the necessary outcomes - clinical management, surveillance and research and public health advocacy.



- State and institutional clinical management expert groups would oversee the development and dissemination of standard workflow for management of pneumonia including guidance on enhanced testing of viral aetiologies and timely use of antivirals for improved disease outcomes.
- A pan-respiratory viruses surveillance platform would be established for studying and improved understanding of evolving virus characteristics, vaccine effectiveness and burden among priority populations. It would help by providing the requisite guidance for undertaking evidence-based decisions on usage of appropriate vaccines.
- The evidence generated at the state level are to be utilized for public health advocacy for influenza prevention and control by the state level working groups. They would undertake focused evidence synthesis especially for specific high-risk groups to provide relevant state level guidance.
- The three pillars of action would work in tandem and constantly interact with each other to inform a comprehensive approach towards concerted efforts for prevention and control of influenza across states of India.
- A major priority for this network would be to build capacity at states for all the three pillars of action.
- These concerted efforts are expected to catalyse larger transition from reactive pandemic response to long term preparedness plan for management of high burden respiratory pathogens.

