
1. Controlling COVID-19 through South Korean Model

Prelims Syllabus: Medicine and Pharmaceuticals

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in News?

- The Korean Model, a vigorous regime of “trace, test, treat”, has shown remarkable results in controlling the spread of the novel coronavirus, without putting a nationwide lockdown in place.

How is the Situation in Korea?

- Korea is now in full control of the spread of the disease. The number of new confirmed cases per day has been showing steady decline since hitting a peak at 989 in February to double-digit figures as of mid-March.
- Korea might be the only country that hasn't imposed a lockdown within its territories or even of its international borders.

How has this been possible? What is the 'Korean Model'?

- It is grounded on concentrated testing of high-risk areas and clusters.
- Korea found out at the beginning of the spread of the virus that a certain religious cult and its gathering was the cause of a large portion of the spread in a certain area of the country. This group had massive gatherings in a closed-off space.
- The government listed all members of the group across the country, tracked their whereabouts and conducted tests on a massive scale, leading to the rapid increase in the number of confirmed cases.
- However, Korea succeeded in identifying and isolating potential cases at a very early stage and finally flattened the curve.

Other Best Practices followed by Korea:

- The moment the virus DNA pattern was confirmed in Wuhan, Korean medical teams and bio-companies were able to develop new testing kits with surprising speed. This made it possible for Korea to conduct mass-scale testing of 18,000 cases a day.
- Anybody in Korea who has symptoms or reasons to be tested can get the test within minutes at 'drive-thru' or 'walk-thru' testing centres and receive the result by text message the very next day. Korea made available over 650 testing centres nationwide.

Is it possible for India to Replicate this Model?

- Given India's demography and medical infrastructure, lockdowns are necessary. However, openness and transparency is important to tackling this situation and identifying and isolating the core of the spread of the virus with full medical capacity at the earliest possible stage is key. This is the essence of the 'Korean model'.

