

To,

1. **Dr. Harsh Vardhan**  
Union Minister  
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare  
Government of India  
[hfm@gov.in](mailto:hfm@gov.in)
  2. **Dr. Balram Bhargav**  
Director General  
Indian Council of Medical Research  
Ansari Nagar, New Delhi,  
[ssecy-dg@icmr.gov.in](mailto:ssecy-dg@icmr.gov.in)
  3. **Mr. P. Raghevendra Rao**  
Secretary  
Department of Chemicals & Petrochemicals-Bhopal Cell  
Ministry of Chemical & Fertilizers  
Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi  
[sec.cpc@nic.in](mailto:sec.cpc@nic.in)
  4. **Mr. Gopal Reddy**  
Chief Secretary  
Govt of Madhya Pradesh  
Mantralaya, Vallabh Bhawan, Bhopal, MP  
[cs@mp.nic.in](mailto:cs@mp.nic.in)
  5. **Dr. Pallavi Jain Govil**  
Principal Secretary  
Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief & Rehabilitation  
Govt of Madhya Pradesh, Mantralaya, Vallabh Bhawan, Bhopal  
[pshealth@mp.gov.in](mailto:pshealth@mp.gov.in)
- Cc: Justice VK Aggarwal**  
Chairman, Monitoring Committee for Medical Rehabilitation of Bhopal Gas Victims  
[mont\\_committee@rediffmail.com](mailto:mont_committee@rediffmail.com)

21 March 2020

**Sub: Immediate steps to be taken for identification, testing and medical care of COVID - 19 in the population affected by the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal.**

Dear Sirs & Madam,

On behalf of organisations working with the survivors of the 1984 Union Carbide Disaster, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that the little over half million people of Bhopal who continue to suffer consequences of the disaster are

much more vulnerable in contracting COVID-19 in comparison to the general population.

As you may be aware, several reports to the Parliament, large number of studies published in international scientific journals and records of government run hospitals in the last three and half decades have documented the long term health damage caused to hundreds of thousands of Bhopalis as a result of their acute exposure to Methyl isocyanate. At least a quarter of the 5,74,375 individuals officially acknowledged to have inhaled the poisonous gas are today battling chronic and disabling diseases.

The toxic exposure is known to have damaged the immune system of such a large population in Bhopal that the situation was described as chemically induced AIDS by a medical researcher. It will be pertinent to mention that taking cognizance of the magnitude and complexity of the health situation of the Bhopalis, the Supreme Court of India has accorded the Bhopal survivor's right to healthcare the status of the constitutional right to life.

Through this letter, **we are seeking your urgent intervention towards providing essential services of testing and critical care to the gas affected population in view of their heightened vulnerability to the COVID - 19 pandemic.**

**A. Data on vulnerability of the gas affected population of Bhopal to COVID-19.**

The most current data on COVID-19 indicates that people with any Cardiovascular and Pulmonary problems, Diabetes, Cancers and most importantly compromised immune systems are 79% more at risk of being infected by the Corona virus, becoming critically ill and dying due to COVID-19. Further for a person with any of 2 of the above health problems the risk of the above outcomes is 2.5 times in comparison to the general population. (Source-<https://www.worldometers.info>)

Data from 8 community health units of the ICMR run Bhopal Memorial Hospital & Research Centre (BMHRC) in Bhopal from 1998 to 2016 presented on their official website ([www.bmhrc.org](http://www.bmhrc.org) on 21/01/2020) shows that 50.4% of gas affected patients suffer from Cardiovascular problems, 59.6% of them suffer from Pulmonary problems and 15.6% of them suffer from Diabetes. Further as per the records of the Office of the Welfare Commissioner, Bhopal Gas Victims, 10,550 (1.84% of the gas exposed population) have been granted ex gratia compensation as Cancer patients.

In view of the above and considering the fact that multi systemic damage is one of the characteristic features of the health impact of the gas disaster in Bhopal, it would be safe to say that the over half a million **Bhopalis exposed to Union Carbide's gases are at least 5 times more vulnerable to COVID-19 than a general population.** Accordingly, it is very much likely that unless

urgent steps are taken by the concerned government authorities, too many Bhopalis will suffer from COVID - 19 and die from it.

**B. Conditions in the hospitals meant for gas victims are possibly contributing to the spread of Corona virus.**

Visits to the BMHRC and to any of its 8 community units as well as 6 gas relief hospital run by the Department of Bhopal Gas Tragedy & Rehabilitation, Govt of Madhya Pradesh currently show that the concerned authorities have not at all woken up to the urgency of spreading awareness for prevention of COVID-19.

Date of Visit	Name of Hospital	Signage	Content	Photo
19 March	Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital	1, A4 size B&W poster	5 point brief	1
19 March	Shakir Ali Hospital	1, A4 size B&W poster  1, 4X4 poster	Homeopathy medicine to cure Coronavirus will be administered  Asking patients to greet other with Namaste	Photo 2,3
19 March	Indira Gandhi Women & Child Hospital	1, A4 size B&W poster (pasted on lift)  1, 4X4 coloured poster	Patient should only bring one attendant with them  Asking patients to greet other with Namaste-No specific mention	Photo 4
19 March	Kamla Nehru Hospital	1, A4 size illegible advisory of MOHFW	Asking patients to greet other with Namaste	Photo 5
19 March	Pulmonary Medicine Centre	1 A4 size B&W poster  1 4X4 coloured poster	Asking patients to cover their face with cloth while sneezing and coughing.  Asking patients to greet other with Namaste	Photo6
19 March	BMHRC, Main Hospital Mini Unit No2- Station Bajariya	None 1 A3 size B&W poster	None  Poster issued by "Jagran Josh" on Swine Flu	Photo 7
In all these hospitals there is a massive crowd and no plans have been put in place to segregate patients from each other or for hand washing				Photo 8-13

### **C. Additional facts in support of Special attention to Bhopal survivors**

In addition to their increased vulnerability, as underlined above, the Bhopal survivors have a justified claim to special attention for protection from COVID - 19 due to the following two facts :

1. **Living conditions :** The technical report of the epidemiological study on Bhopal gas victims by the ICMR highlights the fact that a significant majority of the survivors population is economically disadvantaged. Most survivors live in crowded and unhygienic conditions with rooms as small as 100 sq ft and no facility of running water. Special attention needs to be paid to ensure that facilities for handwashing are available to them. Likewise special attention needs to be paid for identifying symptomatic spreaders in disadvantaged communities and arranging for their care in isolation.
2. **Working conditions :** According to ICMR data on Bhopal survivors over 60 % are dependent on hard manual labour for their livelihood. Many of them such as sanitation workers, vegetable and other cart vendors, drivers, police and security guards and casual labour will continue to work mainly because of economic compulsions. Such people need to be provided with the means, including PPE to keep themselves safe despite potential -contact with virus infected individuals.

In view of the above the following steps need to be taken urgently by the concerned authorities

**i. Awareness Spreading in Hospitals & in Gas Affected Communities:** Currently there is no relevant material available in the hospital on COVID 19 on stopping the spread of the disease. It is pertinent to have audio visual material available in all hospitals about COVID-19. Community health workers, social workers need to be immediately deployed in the gas affected communities to educate & spread awareness on COVID 19.

**ii. Identification & Testing:** There is an urgent need to set up a Corona OPD in the 6 state run gas relief hospitals and in the 8 mini units of BMHRC to identify gas victims who will require testing for COVID 19. A system needs to be put in place to ensure that testing of these identified cases happen at the earliest. It has also come to our knowledge that AIIMS Bhopal has tested less than 50 samples & currently their testing equipment is non functioning. More testing centers/sampling centers need to be increased. In order to curb the spread it is pertinent to increase the number of testing centers. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) should develop BMHRC as a testing center for COVID-19.

**iii. Caring of critical cases:** A set up of one hospital with ICU, isolation wards, ventilators and supply of relevant medicines & consumables such as oxygen should be done immediately. For this purpose we suggest using the building of the

50 bed Pulmonary Medicine Centre (Rasool Ahmed Siddiqui Gas Relief Hospital) situated in Jahangirabad.

The undersigned organisations & other organisations are already working on spreading awareness in the gas affected communities on COVID-19. In this context NGO's working among the gas victims have published a pamphlet to raise awareness in the gas exposed population about the disease. A copy of the pamphlet is attached. The gas relief department could use this pamphlet or develop their own material to distribute in the gas affected areas. (Annexure 1-Pamphlet)

We look forward to hearing from you.

रशीदा बी

**Rashida Bi,**

Bhopal Gas Peedit  
Mahila Stationery  
Karmchari Sangh  
9425688215

नवाब खाँ

**Nawab Khan,**

Bhopal Gas Peedit  
Mahila Purush  
Sangharsh Morcha  
9165347881

*Satinath Sarangi*

**Rachna Dhingra,  
Satinath Sarangi**

Bhopal Group for  
Information and  
Action  
9826167369

**Nousheen Khan**

Children Against  
Dow Carbide  
9713975671

Contact: 44, Sant Kanwar Ram Nagar, Berasia Road, Bhopal, MP 462038; Email: [rachnya@gmail.com](mailto:rachnya@gmail.com)

Photographs of Gas Relief Hospital

