

COVID-19 is airborne but doesn't mean outside air is contaminated; here's what it means

NEW DELHI, APRIL 18: The Lancet report that states that unlike what was believed earlier, coronavirus might actually be airborne, is the talk of the town. The report, authored by six experts from the US, the UK and Canada, said, "SARS-CoV-2 is transmitted primarily by the airborne route". The authors also gave 10 reasons backing their claim. They also called for immediate modification of established COVID-19 protocols. But this might not mean quite what you think it means. Many have taken it to believe that the outside air could be contaminated with coronavirus and stepping out might mean that one contracts the virus. However, that's not the case. Faheem Younus, Chief of Infectious Diseases at



University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health, explained what it actually means. "Lancet study: Airborne does NOT mean outside air is contaminated. It means the virus may remain suspended in the air typically in indoor settings - and pose a risk. Our parks and beaches are still the safest places to enjoy without a mask (provided 6 ft

distance)," he tweeted. Younus also explained the easiest way to keep oneself safe from the virus - face masks. He elaborated that it is known that COVID spreads through droplets to being airborne. "LANCET STUDY: No worries. We know COVID spreads (droplet to airborne) in a spectrum," adding that the best solution is N95 or

KN95 masks, and not cloth masks. He also suggested that the masks must be used alternatively every 24 hours. "Solution: Buy two N95 or KN95 masks. Use one today; leave the other in a PAPER bag for tomorrow. Keep alternating every 24 hours. Reuse for weeks if they aren't damaged. Ditch cloth masks," said Younus. The Lancet report says that detailed analysis of human behaviour and interactions, as well as room sizes and other variables are consistent with airborne spread of SARS-CoV-2. "Long-range transmission of SARS-CoV-2 between people in adjacent rooms but never in each other's presence has been documented in quarantine hotels," the paper said.

Godrej Appliances expects indigenisation to increase, AC sales to jump by double digits

NEW DELHI, APRIL 18: Godrej Appliances expects the indigenisation ratio of components for products such as residential air-conditioners to go up to 75 per cent in three to five years, with an increase in the local value addition, said a company official. This would be helped by the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme by the government for air-conditioners, to encourage the brands to invest and create a component ecosystem into the country towards an Aatmanirbhar Bharat.



Besides, Godrej Appliances, a unit of Godrej & Boyce, the flagship company of the Godrej Group, is looking for around a 15 per cent increase in value in sales this year, in comparison to 2019, helped by factors such as pent-up demand and work from home. "We expect around 15-20 per cent growth (in value terms) in the AC market this year in comparison to 2019," Godrej Appliances Business Head and Executive Vice-President Kamal Nandi told.

Like other AC manufacturers, Godrej Appliances also went for a price hike recently to ward off inflationary pressure on the raw material inputs and hinted it may go up for a similar move again if the costs continued their northward

push. When being asked about any possible impact on the sale of AC due to curfew in Maharashtra and some other parts of the country, Nandi said it may have an impact of around 15 per cent on the sale but it could be realised once the market opens. Godrej Appliance has around 5-6 per cent share of the residential AC market; while in the washing machine, it has around 10 per cent; and 15 per cent in refrigerators, said Nandi.

The company recently added a new manufacturing line for AC at its Shirwal, Pune-based plant, which would augment its production capacity of four lakh units per annum with an investment of around Rs 50 crore.

Besides AC, its Shirwal plant also manufactures washing machines, refrigerators, chest freezers, and medical refrigerators.

When asked about the indigenisation efforts of the company, Nandi said that currently, it has gone for backward integration for residential AC and now, components such as heat exchangers, IDU, ODU are manufactured by it. "We are still dependent on a lot of imported components such as compressors and electronic. We are working towards indigenising them," he said.

The company expects that after the PLI scheme announced by the government, several brands operating here would invest in components. "Over a period of the next 3-5 years, we should be able to increase the value addition from the current 35-40 per cent to 70-75 per cent," he added.

Currently, components such as inverter PCBs and compressors are imported by the company. "With the PLI scheme

coming for AC, there would be big and small investments coming in this country, and we should either locally purchase them or indigenise them," he said. Nandi added that now, Godrej Appliances has almost completed the indigenisation process for its refrigerator segment, where except for a few electronic components, everything is sourced domestically.

"We are manufacturing here almost every part taking help of the local component ecosystem, and component in very small quantity is imported," he said. Similarly, in washing machines also, the company is almost manufacturing here with the help of the local component ecosystem except for some electronic inputs.

According to Nandi, who also heads the industry body CEAMA, currently on an average the manufacturers import 75 per cent of component (by value) for a residential AC and the rest 25 per cent is done through local value additions. "However, I expect this to be reversed in the next five-six years," he said. The Indian residential AC market is estimated to be around 7-7.5 million units per annum and over 15 companies compete in the segment.

TCS, Infosys, 5 other firms' m-cap drops by Rs 1.4 lakh cr in a week

NEW DELHI, APRIL 18: Seven of the 10 most valued firms witnessed a combined erosion of Rs 1,41,628.37 crore in market valuation last week, with IT companies taking the biggest hit. The market valuation of Tata Consultancy Services tumbled Rs 47,680.78 crore to reach Rs 11,81,218.07 crore. The market capitalisation of Infosys declined Rs

37,579.03 crore to Rs 5,76,275.68 crore. The valuation of Reliance Industries eroded by Rs 30,841.38 crore to Rs 12,26,048.07 crore and that of State Bank of India diminished by Rs 11,735.86 crore to Rs 3,03,347.55 crore. Kotak Mahindra Bank's valuation tumbled Rs 6,620.48 crore to Rs 3,49,903 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever Limited dipped by Rs 4,534.66

crore to Rs 5,77,206.58 crore. Bharti Airtel witnessed a decline of Rs 2,636.18 crore taking its valuation to Rs 2,96,871.53 crore. In contrast, HDFC's valuation jumped Rs 10,697.4 crore to reach Rs 4,64,254.63 crore. HDFC Bank added Rs 3,748.69 crore to its valuation at Rs 7,87,472.56 crore and that of ICICI Bank rose by Rs 123.98 crore to Rs

3,91,902.83 crore. In the ranking of top-10 companies, Reliance Industries Limited was leading the chart, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Hindustan Unilever Limited, Infosys, HDFC, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, State Bank of India and Bharti Airtel. During the holiday-truncated last week, the 30-share BSE benchmark dipped 759.29 points or 1.53 per cent.

India's power consumption increases nearly 45% to 41,91 billion units in Apr

New Delhi, April 18: Power consumption in the country grew nearly 45 per cent in the first half of April to 60.62 billion units (BU) over the corresponding period a year ago, showing robust recovery in industrial and commercial demand of electricity, according to power ministry data. Power consumption in the first half of April last year (from April 1 to 15, 2020) was recorded at 41.91 BU. On the other hand, the peak

power demand met, which is the highest supply in a day, during the first half of this month remained well above the highest record of 132.20 GW in the same period in April 2020. During the first half this month, peak power demand touched the highest level of 182.55 GW on April 8, 2021, and recorded a growth of 38 per cent over 132.20 GW recorded in the entire month of April last year. Power consumption in April

last year had dropped to 84.55 BU from 110.11 BU in the same month in 2019. This happened mainly because of fewer economic activities following imposition of lockdown by the government in the last week of March 2020 to contain the spread of deadly COVID-19. Similarly, peak power demand met also slumped to 132.20 GW in April last year from 176.81 GW in the same month in 2019, showing the impact of lockdown on eco-

nomical activities. Experts are of the view that high growth in power consumption as well as demand in the first half this month is mainly because of base effect. They said, "The power consumption remained low in April last year due to lockdown. Now the high growth rate of power consumption clearly indicates healthy recovery in commercial and industrial demand."

Recommendation for third vaccine dose based on conjecture, more data needed, say experts

NEW DELHI, APRIL 18: More data is needed to establish if a third anti-COVID-19 booster dose will be more effective in fighting the surge of infections in the country as at present the recommendation is based more on conjecture, health experts said. India is battling a massive surge in COVID-19 cases and health ministry data updated on Sunday showed that a record single-day rise of 2,61,500 coronavirus infections has taken the country's total tally to 1,47,88,109, while active cases have surpassed the 18-lakh mark. Pfizer and Moderna recently announced that people who have received both doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna coronavirus vaccines will probably need a booster shot this year and might need an annual shot thereafter. Earlier this month, an expert panel of the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had permitted Bharat Biotech to give a third dose of its COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin to a few volunteers in its clinical trials.



Currently, people eligible for inoculation in the country are being administered Serum Institute of India's Covishield and Covaxin. Both vaccines are being given in two doses in a gap of up to eight weeks. Bharat Biotech has proposed a booster dose after six months of the second dose. Talking about the applicability and effectiveness of a third dose, especially in view of the raging second COVID-19 wave, experts said the third booster dose needs more studies to determine if it will help in fighting infections more effectively. Samiran Panda, Director of the ICMR National AIDS Research Institute, said if the companies are deciding on giving a third booster dose after two doses then it should be based upon data on immunological memory. This means that after two doses what is the status of antibody concentration and after how long it comes below a level after which one needs the third booster dose, he said. "I wonder why the com-

panies are suggesting this and what is the data because COVID-19 we came to know in December 2019 and the vaccines were made in April and August. So we don't have enough data and I think the proposal for third dose is based on a conjecture rather than the time that needs to lapse after which we will have data on how many shots are needed. So time has not come as yet," Panda told. He said now when these companies are talking about boosters there comes the question what would these boosters do. "These boosters are supposed to boost up the immunity to tackle the dwindling concentration of antibodies. It has been found that after 6-9 months the concentration of the antibody comes down but that was mostly in natural infections," Panda said. "For vaccination, how

long does it take to come down is not known because the vaccination drive recently started it has not been even five months," he said.

India launched its vaccination drive against COVID-19 on January 16 and the health ministry on Saturday said that so far 12,25,02,790 doses have been administered.

Dr Giridhara R Babu, professor and the Head of lifecycle epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India, said one needs to study and see if the booster dose will help in fighting the disease more effectively. "How long the protection lasts, based on that it needs to be decided when a booster has to be given. One needs to study and see if the boosters will help in fighting the disease more effectively," he said.

Another healthcare expert said the third dose may play a crucial role in future but at present, there is not enough data to support this claim. "Like flu shots, one might need the booster shots every year but it is too soon to make that assumption as the disease (COVID-19) itself is very new and it has not even been an year since the vaccines have come out. We need more data and study," the expert said.

Wonder why Apple stopped giving chargers with iPhones? Here's the reason

NEW DELHI, APRIL 18: Apple had announced in 2020 that the firm will no longer be giving out charging adapters along with iPhones upon purchase. This decision by the technology giant had caused a furore among buyers. The common outcry was that iPhones are expensive and the least Apple could do is provide a charging adapter along with the smartphone.



Apple had tackled the criticism it faced by stating that this move was for the benefit of the environment. The firm has now released some figures which showcase the impact made by its decision to stop giving out charging adapter with iPhones. Apple has stated that that power adapters use

large amount of materials such as plastic, copper, and zinc for manufacturing. Apple was able to conserve 8.61 lakh tons of copper, zinc and metal by not giving out charging adapters with its iPhones, the firm stated in its Environmental Progress Report. Apple explained that by not giving out a charger it was able to reduce the size of the iPhone box thus making the packaging process more efficient. "Leaving out those adapters was a bold

change for Apple, and a necessary one for our planet," said Apple on the environment page of its website. "Since removing them from iPhone and Apple Watch packaging last year, we've avoided mining a significant amount of materials from the earth, and we've eliminated the emissions that come from processing and transporting them," stated Apple.

In its Environmental Progress Report, Apple states that it was able to reduce CO2 emissions to 22.6 million tons from 25.1 million tons in 2019. The firm claims that by introducing the M1 chip for its Mac devices, the firm was able to reduce its overall carbon footprint by 34 per cent.

'Sharp growth of 10.2% in number of deaths; 7.6% growth in new COVID cases,' says govt

NEW DELHI, APRIL 18: The Union Ministry for Health and Family Welfare on Saturday said that there has been a sharp growth in the number of deaths. New cases of coronavirus are also growing at 1.3 times higher than June 2020, it said. In a meeting of health ministers from 11 states and union territories chaired by Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, the minister said, "India is currently reporting the sharpest growth rate of 7.6 per cent in new COVID cases, which is 1.3 times higher than case growth rate of 5.5 per cent reported in June 2020. This is leading to an alarming rise in the daily number of active cases, which currently stand at 16,79,000. There is also a sharp growth of 10.2 per cent in the number of deaths." He alerted that the gap between new cases and recoveries is widening at a fast pace. All the 11 states and UTs have crossed their highest reported daily case threshold in districts such as Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune, Nashik, Thane, Lucknow, Raipur, Ahmedabad and Au-



rangabad. The minister shed some light on a few silver linings too. He said that India had 1 lab at the beginning of the pandemic which has increased to 2,463 labs with a daily testing capacity of 15 lakh. "The three-tier health infrastructure to treat COVID according to severity now includes 2,084 dedicated COVID hospitals (of which

89 are under the Centre and the rest 1,995 with States), 4,043 dedicated COVID health centres and 12,673 COVID care centres. They have 18,52,265 beds in total including the 4,68,974 beds in the dedicated COVID hospitals." Dr Harsh Vardhan also said that 34,228 ventilators were granted to the states by the Centre last year, further

assuring a fresh supply of ventilators. The minister also, reiterating government's permission, asked the states to utilise up to 50 per cent of their annual allocation of the State Disaster Response Fund and the unspent pending balance under the National Health Mission as on April 1 for COVID-19 management purposes.