

Assam Tea Estates See Over 300% Spike In Covid Cases In Last 10 Days

Assam has 800 tea gardens, 370 of them are Covid-affected while only 271 of these have COVID care centres, as per Assam government data.

Tinsukia: At Keyhung tea estate in Assam's Tinsukia district, Manju Tanti, a 47-year-old worker, sings to herself to keep her spirits high as she goes about plucking tea leaves. It's the crucial plucking season for Assam tea and the estates are operating despite strict restrictions in the state. But Manju, who is a mother of two young children, is worried. As many as 30 of her coworkers have tested positive for Covid in the last few days.

In the last ten days, there has been a spike of over 300 percent in cases among the tea garden workers, deaths have also gone up threefold, according to the state government data accessed by NDTV. 57 new Covid care centres have come up in the tea garden. But around 29 affected tea gardens still don't have Covid care centres.

Till May 28, 6,146 tea garden workers tested positive, 43 of these died while till May 19, there were 1,851 positive cases in 229 tea gardens with 14 deaths - only 214 of these tea gardens had Covid care centres by that time.

Assam has 800 tea gardens, 370 of them are Covid-affected while only 271 of these have COVID care centres, as per the data.

"We are worried since so many workers like me are working in the tea garden, what will happen next is unclear. We need total vaccination in the gardens else there can be a major spread any day," she told NDTV.

The estate's labour line - where the workers live - has been declared a containment zone. Positive patients are in COVID care facility inside the estate. "In the first wave, we hardly had cases and now we already have 30 positives cases. Vaccination has started but the pace needs to be picked up," said Keyhung's deputy manager Pankaj Neog.

The tea tribe community with their low daily wages, lack of education and poor hygiene are extremely vulnerable to covid infections- it's a big reason for worry since they make about 18 percent of Assam's population.

"We are monitoring the situation closely. We have formed Covid management committees in every tea garden, they are sending us information where we need to start vaccinations and where testing is required. For the positive cases who are either quarantined or hospitalised, we are giving ₹ 2,000 financial assistance for ration for their family," Assam's Labour and Tea Tribe welfare minister Sanjay Kishan told NDTV. Mr Kishan, who hails from the tea tribe community, has been touring the affected tea gardens.

"Complete vaccination of the tea garden community can perhaps check a mass spread of the virus and the government needs to prioritise it," felt Maram Tanti of the All-Assam Tea Tribe Students' Association (ATTSA).

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/coronavirus-assam-tea-estates-see-over-300-spike-in-covid-cases-in-last-10-days-2451988>