

## **Short communication**

SARS-CoV-2 - Health education through Virtual Awareness Programme (VAP) for School children

### **Abstract**

SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has created havoc globally and negatively influenced the lives of children, particularly. Lockdowns and social distancing have brought down the closure of the institutions providing educational facilities. However, technological advances have been utilized extensively to bridge the gaps in the education system during this pandemic. It is also essential to impart knowledge to the children regarding the present pandemic and the etiquette to be followed to control the rapid outburst of the disease. The technology can be used to impart this knowledge to the children using the proposed Virtual Awareness Program (VAP). This program would be aimed at creating awareness among the children regarding the present pandemic so that they would be well equipped to manage to anticipate changes.

### **Key Words**

**SARS-CoV-2, Virtual Awareness Programme (VAP), Health education, School children**

### **INTRODUCTION**

SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has created a distressing situation worldwide. Despite the extensive research, advancements in the medical and pharmaceutical fields, vaccination, and a wide array of treatment modalities, it has become a significant challenge to curb this menace. The rapid genetic mutations in the virus are the real challenge. However, the brighter side of this threat is the availability of Covid-appropriate behavior protocols such as wearing the mask,

adequate sanitization, social distancing, and avoiding touching face, mouth, and eyes. A good follow-up of this basic etiquette can reduce the spread and acquisition of this disease.

One of the worst affected sections of the population of this pandemic is the children, who are at the crucial age of their physical and mental development.<sup>1</sup> Their education and all the recreational activities are affected. Currently, the debate is on the role of children in the transmission of disease and its implication for school closures/openings. Newly **found mutated** genomic sequence of Delta Plus variant may affect children.<sup>2</sup> In fact, delay in children's immunization is a worldwide fear due to a lack of vaccine trial approvals. With the next wave being anticipated to affect the children, coupled with the unknown vaccination status among them, it pushes them into a real danger zone.<sup>3</sup> It is time to be extra precarious regarding this section.

The current situation urges an emergency action plan to prevent the spread of disease. Much information is available on Covid-19 and is communicated through social media, with most of it being non-authenticated.<sup>4</sup> Government authorities and several organizations are educating the public through numerous platforms. However, most of this health education is targeted toward the general population — not children specifically. Frequently, there is a lack in providing comprehensive and educational materials suitable for children. Even though there is a lot of alertness about COVID-19, we do not have sufficient child-friendly resources to help children comprehend the circumstances. Though children copy behavior from parents, they are not prepared with a genuine thoughtfulness of changes required for the present scenario, possibly resulting in misperception, anxiety, and gaps in sanitation or public etiquette.<sup>5</sup> **To enhance adult communications effectively and increase child acquiescence, it is urgently necessary to create a suitable and engaging health and public safety instruction aimed at youngsters.**

Virtual platform has become the need of the hour for all kinds of communications and also provided an opportunity for the expansion and growth of more flexible learning solutions that make better use of distance education and digital explanations. Present-day education has become virtual, with all the teachers and school children adapting well to this new mode of teaching and learning. Concerning virtual learning, studies reflect that the internet can be an essential pedagogical means for students, especially underserved students, to provide unavailable resources and sources of information in developing countries (Levin and Arafeh, 2002).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, according to a study by Karakara and Osabouhien (2019), "ICTs Access gap in wealth could also impair the probability of children obtaining a fully satisfying education." To continue learning from home, Online platforms have often been the first to enable children; indeed, they are usually the most active learning modality in getting some form of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Hence Virtual Awareness Programme (VAP) can be an excellent stage to educate young minds with good assimilative capabilities regarding the present SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. (Table 1) Educating them will be easier. They will apply all the essential preventive protocols upon learning, which may bring a drastic socio-behavioral change. Creating awareness will help children to protect themselves in the current pandemic. They can be thought regarding the preventive measures to be followed, sanitization etiquette, healthy habits, nature of the disease, social responsibilities, and social responsibility of their elders. Basic information about coronavirus disease (COVID-19), including its symptoms, complications, how it is transmitted and how to prevent transmission. Information about COVID-19 through reputable sources such as UNICEF, WHO and national health ministry advisories. Through VAP awareness can be created regarding fake information/myths that may circulate by word-of-mouth or online.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, knowledgeable children can be change representatives for their family, community, and beyond. With the world going digital due to the current pandemic, the virtual model is the best mode for bringing this positive change.

**Table 1-** VAP can be used for orienting the children with the following topics:

Modes of transmission and risks of infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sneezing, Coughing, Talking,</li> <li>▪ Touching the infected surfaces</li> <li>▪ Contacting the infected person</li> </ul>
Preventive Protocols for SARS Co V -2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clean your hands often with soap and water or a hand rub.</li> <li>▪ Maintain a safe distance from anyone who is coughing or sneezing.</li> <li>▪ Wear a mask always.</li> <li>▪ Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.</li> <li>▪ Cover your nose and mouth with your bent elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing.</li> <li>▪ Stay home if you feel unwell.</li> <li>▪ If you have a fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention.</li> </ul>
Protocols to be followed by a sick individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you feel sick, you should rest, drink plenty of fluid, and eat nutritious food.</li> <li>• Stay in a separate room from other family members, and use a dedicated bathroom if possible.</li> <li>• Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.</li> <li>• Everyone should keep a healthy lifestyle at home. Maintain a nutritious diet, sleep, stay active, and make social contact with loved ones through the phone or internet.</li> <li>• Keep to regular routines and schedules as much as possible.</li> <li>• Feeling sad, stressed, or confused during a crisis is normal.</li> <li>• Talking to people you trust, such as friends and family, can help.</li> <li>• If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counselor</li> </ul>
Importance of vaccination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significance of vaccination in prevention against disease acquisition and progression</li> </ul>

Creative and innovative ways to solve problems by leveraging technology, cartoons/ animation can be created to provide information to children on how to stay safe and protect their loved ones. Short information videos encourage students to become agents of change by

helping alter attitudes and behavior and putting measures to protect themselves, their friends, and their community into practice. Information pamphlets could come in handy for the teachers to sensitize children.

Precautions constructed in an acronym, interestingly the name of the place from where it was originated: **WUHAN**<sup>9</sup> –

- W - Washing hands often,
- U - Use masks properly,
- H - Have temperature checked regularly,
- A - Avoid large crowds,
- N - Never touch face without washing hands

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO estimates that 91.3% of the world's students were learning remotely, with 194 governments ordering country-wide closures of their schools and more than 1.3 billion students learning in online classrooms.<sup>10</sup>

## **Conclusion**

VAP can be an accessible and effective program that not only provides an opportunity for children to learn from their houses but also helps chase away their fear regarding SARS CoV-2. It is time to evolve numerous such programs for children including in local languages, to educate and eradicate the current SARS-CoV-19 pandemic.

## **References**

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