

IMF Health Advisory, addressing the issue of outdoors travel in the context of raging COVID19 pandemic by Dr Anil Gurtoo :-

A) The Issue: As we watch the COVID story unfold in most unpredictable twists and turns, the question upper most in our minds is this:

What does it all mean to my mountain travel and activity plans for the coming season? To Go ? Or, Not to Go? That is the Question.

B) Thinking Through: Making a Decision:

1) When confronting a situation marked by : Uncertainty and Rapid Change, I would adopt a Risk Based Approach .

2) I would ask the following 3 Questions:

If I were to go out to mountains then:

a)What all can go wrong? The full spectrum of all that can go wrong.

b)What is the Likelihood of it happening? The probabilities for each adverse event.

c)What will be the consequences should it materialise?

For example,if I catch COVID infection on the way, or from my team mate, I am more likely to suffer serious outcomes due to high altitude induced immunosuppression / I could infect the whole team and become stranded without any medical aid or possibility of rescue / I or my team could pass on the infection to already vulnerable mountain communities or the porters and trigger an epidemic in an already under resourced area.

The Likelihood of such a scenario materialising is pretty high at 60% or more. The Consequences would be truly tragic.

C) Based on answers you generate to those 3 aforementioned Questions, you create a Risk Level and then integrate it with following variables :-

1) The Risk Level.

2) Your Age and Pre-existing Medical Conditions ( risk of adverse outcomes increases with age and especially, if one has health issues like : Diabetes, Hypertension, Heart disease, Chronic Lung Disease, kidney or liver disease.)

3) Essentiality of your Travel.

So, given what we know as on 22nd March, 2020, I would recommend the following :-

1) Avoid All Non-Essential Mountain Travel and Activities for the next THREE months.

2) Reschedule all present plans to beyond a 3 month timeline.Keep tracking the evolving situation.

Be ready to for a No-Go should the situation again deteriorate after 3 months.