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## **Are women and girls at more risk of contracting COVID-19 than men?**

Over [30 million](https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/in) people have been infected by the coronavirus in India. COVID-19 can infect people of all gender and ages. However, some women and girls may be at higher risk because they are poorer and lack information and resources, or because they are at the front line as caregivers and workers in the health and service sectors.

In India, women make up a significant proportion of all healthcare workers and more than [80 per cent](https://human-resources-health.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12960-021-00575-2) of nurses and midwives. Yet, when it comes to decision-making roles in the health sector, they are largely absent, and they get paid much less than their male counterparts. Only [13 per cent](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/km-qap/UNDP-UNWomen-UPitt-COVID19-Task-Force-Participation.pdf) of the members of the national COVID-19 task force are women.

Since women in India spend more hours caring for children, the elderly and sick family members, and masks and other personal protective equipment are often designed and sized for men, women may be at risk of more exposure to the virus.

Right now, there is also a concern that [less women](https://dashboard.cowin.gov.in/#skip_to_main) are getting vaccinated than men in India – [17 per cent](https://www.reuters.com/world/india/women-falling-behind-indias-covid-19-vaccination-drive-2021-06-08/) more men than women have been partially or fully vaccinated

## **Has COVID-19 increased violence against women in India?**

As the COVID-19 lockdowns trapped women at home with their abusers, domestic violence rates spiked throughout the world. In India, reports of domestic violence, child marriage, cyber violence and trafficking of women and girls increased within the first few months of the pandemic. According to the National Commission of Women data, India recorded a [2.5 times increase](https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Advisory%20on%20Rights%20of%20Women_0.pdf) in domestic violence between February and May 2020. [Some women’s organizations](https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-domestic-violence-complaints-at-a-10-year-high-during-covid-19-lockdown/article31885001.ece) reported that in the first four phases of the lockdown, they received more reports of domestic violence than they had in the last ten years for a similar period of time. Others indicated that many women were unable to report the violence, as they had less privacy and means to access help.

The Indian Government classified domestic violence shelter and support services as “essential” – an important step in COVID-19 response. During the first and second waves of the pandemic, 700 One-Stop-Crisis centres remained open in India, supporting over 300,000 women who suffered abuse and needed shelter, legal aid and medical attention.

The current draft of the anti-trafficking bill that will be tabled soon in the Parliament is another welcome step, as it is set to increase penalties for perpetrators and make reporting of such crimes mandatory

## **How can we support women and girls in India during the COVID-19 crisis?**

Every crisis impacts women and girls differently than men, because of existing gender norms and inequalities. To build back better and equal from the COVID-19 crisis, policy, investment and action must be shaped by women and girls and deliberately target them.

UN Women is working with the government and grassroots organizations on the ground to provide food, personal protective equipment for women, and cash assistance.

Through our communications campaigns, we are making sure that women get verified information about disease prevention and vaccination, and creating public awareness about gender-based violence. Through our programmes, we are making education and vocational training available for women through digital and distance learning, and helping them find pathways to employment and small businesses. We are working with our national partners to provide shelter, financial and legal assistance and medical help to survivors of gender-based violence in COVID-safe spaces.

UN Women is advocating with the government and private sector allies to invest in the formal and informal care economies to create sustainable jobs and boost women’s empowerment and income.