

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC****93% medical waste out of proper management**

Merely 6.6% of COVID-19-related health-safety and medical waste are managed properly in Bangladesh. Rest of the 93.4% waste remains out of proper treatment.

The findings were revealed in a study on “Effective Management of Medical Waste amid COVID-19 Pandemic” conducted by the Climate Change Programme of BRAC during July 20 to August 10, 2020. The results of the study were shared in a webinar held today, Monday, October 5 2020.

The study result shows that a total 248 tons of medical waste are generated daily from the hospitals and healthcare facilities all around the country. Among these, only 35 tons (14.1%) of waste are under proper management and this management is limited within the capital city Dhaka. On top of that, the treatment of these waste is managed by a single private organisation. Although waste separation facilities are available in the healthcare centres and hospitals in the country there are no medical waste disposal or treatment facilities in place in those establishments.

On the other hand, 282.45 tons of medical waste are generated every day from the PPEs used by mass people to protect themselves against COVID-19, all of which are mixed with household waste before disposal.

Speaking at the event as chief guest, Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operation Minister Tazul Islam said, “The volume of waste went up as the capacity of buying of our people also increased. We have shortcomings in waste management. Lack of prior prioritising, lack of awareness among people, technological shortcomings are among several of reasons behind this. Medical waste has been added to the woe.”

“A policy is being formulated stipulating all hospitals will have to burn their waste. The country belongs to all of us and that is why all government and non-government entities should come forward to tackle the issue,” added the minister.

The study conducted by BRAC Climate Change Program reveals that 71% of the surveyed population use PPEs and a large portion of them live in the cities. Almost 100% of all the households dispose of their COVID-19-related waste mixed with their household waste due to a lack of proper management service. Waste collectors have also said that they have found COVID-19-related waste among household waste during collection. However, 81.4% of the participants think that the untreated waste may increase the risk of infection and 90.6% have



expressed that these untreated waste are harmful to health and the environment.

In this regard, BRAC Executive Director Asif Saleh said, “The volume of medical waste only in Dhaka for the month of May was 3,000-ton. This proves medical waste is turning to be a hazard for the public and the environment.”

In order to prevent coronavirus infection, the government made using masks mandatory while stepping outside home from May 30, 2020. However, this became a financial burden for 82.1% of the surveyed people. Almost half (50%) of the participants re-use their PPEs.

As many as 78.5% of the total 5,000 participants of the study think that most of the PPEs are for single use though 83.7% of them agree that most people are not aware of the proper disposal of the COVID-19-related waste. 88.4% of the people think that it is not right to mix the COVID-19-related waste with other household waste and 92.4% agree that a proper management system is necessary.

Moreover, Total 300 doctors and healthcare workers participated in the survey and only 43.6% of them are aware of the ‘Medical Waste Management Policy 2008’. 84% of the healthcare workers think that existing medical waste management is very fragile. 90.3% of them believe that an integrated and participatory planning and its proper implementation is necessary.

The experts who participated in the study, believe that though there were guidelines and a public notice on COVID-19-related household and healthcare waste management from Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and Department of Environment (DoE) but it was not implemented properly.

Both the common people and experts agree that formulation of a modern and integrated policy on waste management, its financing and rapid implementation is very important. At the same time, awareness should be raised among people. An innovative step involving public private partnership is a demand of time now.

Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Chairperson of BRAC, said four aspects are needed to be prioritised to tackle the crisis.

He said, “Turning public awareness into a habit, coordinated effort of all stakeholders, achieving waste management capabilities, fixing a sustainable solution to the existing problem--- these four aspects are crucial to tackle the crisis. There should be a specific division in terms of who is doing what and the ministries of health, environment and local government should work together to this end.”

Dr. A K M Rafique Ahmmed, Director General of Department of Environment said, “Currently, there is no specific infrastructure or initiative in the current system for medical waste management. This is crucial to public health and this can be implemented through public-private partnership. BRAC’s extensive network across the country can be utilised to bring out a timely solution to this



crisis. The Department of Environment would like to get BRAC as a partner in this regard.”

Air Commodore Md Badrul Amin, Chief Waste Management Officer of Dhaka South City Corporation, said, “Medical waste related to COVID-19 are getting mixed with regular waste and these remain unseparated. An effort is underway to make people aware so that they keep their medical waste separated. Even hospital waste is being mixed with regular waste which is hazardous for public health. Directorates concerned should be communicated to make sure that hospital waste is being handed separately to authorities concerned.”

ওয়েবিনারের ভিডিও লিংক: : <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J0r-oEulbArFIRSLtmtLRY8uyDnEop6P/view?usp=sharing>

Thanks

Mahbubul Alam Kabir  
Sr. Media Manager, BRAC

For further information : **Md. Abu Bakar Siddique**, Senior Manager  
BRAC Climate Change Programme, Cell: 01714072289,