

BEACONS OF HOPE A SHOT OF HOPE

Two 21-yr-old sarpanches make villages Covid-free

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Young leaders are leading the fight against Covid-19 in rural Maharashtra. Two 21-year-old sarpanches, youngest in the state, from Solapur district, became overnight stars after chief minister Uddhav Thackeray and Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised them for their efforts to make their villages Covid-free.

The government also focused attention on making villages Covid-free as the rate of infection is higher in rural areas. Komal Karpe, sarpanch of Antroli village, brought the village out of the grip of Covid-19. After keeping the 2,200-odd villagers safe in the first wave, the second hit hard after the first case was detected in March. “There was panic in the village. People were refusing to get tested. We formed a group with the help of local police, gram panchayat members and anganwadi sevikas to ensure testing and tracing was done,” said Karpe, a BSc graduate in Botany.

The village, which had 80 cases and 15 deaths, does not have a single case for two weeks. It set up a centre at the zilla parishad school, and all coming from outside were kept quarantined for 14 days. “There was no entry for outside vendors, a janata curfew was imposed twice, and essential shops were shut. Goods were delivered at the doorstep with villagers’ help,” said Karpe.

For LLB student and Ghatane village sarpanch, Raturaj Deshmukh, the last two months were not easy. “We had our first case in April, people started to move from the village to farms. We had two deaths from a family. There was panic,” said Deshmukh. The village started a ‘Be Positive and Covid Negative’ campaign. Detailed guidelines were readied for villagers and people from outside.

“We screened all 1,500 villagers, and symptomatic people were tested. There was resistance to get tested initially,” said Deshmukh. People from outside were quarantined for at least three days and villagers stepping out for work, especially to crowded talukas, were tested with antigen kits every three

days. “Villagers roaming around without masks were fined Rs200,” said Deshmukh, and the village does not have any case since May 10.

Vaccinations continue to be the priority for the young village heads who are battling misconceptions and myths. “People were reluctant. I started with my family, vaccinating my father (48) and grandmother (68). I could not take the jab due to the age limit,” she said. Deshmukh said they vaccinated 45% people aged above 45.



**Ruturaj Deshmukh &
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