

Original Research Article

Improving the Governance Mechanism for Responding to Public Health Emergencies under COVID-19

Xinle Li^{1*}, Changxin Bi²

¹School of Public Administration, Hohai University, Nanjing 211100, China. E-mail: 15651008100@qq.com

²Institute of Hui Studies, Ningxia University, Yinchuan 750021, China

Abstract: The outbreak of COVID-19 in December 2019 has been spreading in China and even around the world, and public health emergencies will have certain impact on the country's stable development. The government provides a variety of public services for building a harmonious society, including public health services. The government is at the forefront of COVID-19 epidemic management. Effective governance mechanisms will reduce the spread of the epidemic, maintain the image of the government and keep social stability. Therefore, it is of great strategic significance to improve the government's governance mechanism for responding to public health emergencies. Based on the epidemic background of COVID-19, this article expounds the current situation of the government's governance mechanism for responding to public health emergencies in China, explains the significance of the construction of the mechanism. Suggestions are put forward on improving the construction of the government's governance mechanism for responding to public health emergencies, so as to better respond to public health emergencies in the future.

Keywords: Outbreak of COVID-19; Governance Mechanism; Public Health Emergency

When an epidemic breaks out, especially in the case of the emerging epidemic, it is a huge test of the government whether it scientifically predict and timely deploy the strategy facing unsmooth information communication and unclear scientific explanation. General Secretary Xi Jinping and leading officials of the CPC Central Committee have personally directed the prevention and control of the epidemic, brought COVID-19 into category B infectious diseases in accordance with the law, adopted category A measures for strict management, and formulated and implemented a series of strategic strategies in a timely manner.

1. The current situation of the governance mechanism for public health emergencies of the Chinese

government

China's involvement in the management of public health emergencies is relatively late. Compared with public health emergencies, there are more studies on natural disaster management in China. The occurrence of SARS in 2003 promoted the research on public health emergencies in China. From the academic and legal levels, experts in various fields are promoting the research on public health emergencies in China.

On the academic level, Zhang Fuqiang and Sun Yuming (2003) mentioned the urgency of solving major social problems. For governments at all levels, they should actively perform their duties and give priority to solving various social problems. Governments at all levels should administer in accordance with law, actively

solving various social problems. Governments at all levels should administer in accordance with law, actively promote the construction of the process of rule of law, and focus on the construction of public emergency response mechanism, government credibility mechanism and information disclosure mechanism^[1]. Fang Yaming (2006) pointed out that local governments should strengthen the awareness of risk prevention and control and self-rescue ability of social work in the face of public health emergencies, strictly perform governance responsibilities, and establish a comprehensive and authoritative governance institution to deal with public health emergencies^[2]. Li Lan (2010) explained that the government should enhance its sense of responsibility and maintain a high sensitivity^[3].

On the legal level, the SARS incident in 2003 promoted the birth of the *Regulations on Preparedness for and Response to Emergent Public Health Hazards*, accelerated the legal process of public health emergencies in China, and provided experience for the construction of the legal system in the future. The *Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China* issued in 2007 provides detailed provisions on public health emergencies from six aspects, including prevention and emergency preparedness, monitoring and early warning, so as to ensure that there are laws to follow. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, relevant documents issued by the state, such as “Notice on Strengthening the Community Prevention and Control Work of Covid-19 Epidemic (Issued by Mechanism for Pneumonia [2020] No.5),” “Notice on the Issuance of Recent Plan for Covid-19 Prevention and Control ([2020] No.9)” of the state, “Urgent Notice on Further Mobilizing Urban and Rural Community Organizations to Work on Covid-19 Prevention and Control ([2020] No.9),” “Notice on Further Improving Epidemic Prevention and Control in Urban and Rural Communities by Studying and Implementing the Important Directives of General Secretary Xi Jinping” (Issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs [2020] No.13)” provides guidance for the prevention and control of COVID-19.

2. The necessity of constructing government to deal with public health emergencies

Public health emergencies will threaten social sta-

bility and development, and the effectiveness of government work will have a certain impact on the practicality of law implementation and the establishment of a good image of the government. As a government, it is necessary to timely assess the characteristics of the outbreak, effectively handle the crisis, enhance the ability to foresee the epidemic, reduce losses and maintain a good image of the government.

2.1 Reduce losses and maintain social stability

The destructive force of the epidemic will spread to all walks of life in China and the whole world, affect social productivity, cause chaos in the trading market, bring economic operation to a standstill in a large area, and undermine the normal operation of society. The construction of the governance mechanism for responding to public health emergencies can predict beforehand for emergency preparedness and early prevention and control, reasonably allocate the resources in time, give full play to the advantages of resource allocation, make resource allocation efficiency, reduce the losses to minimum, alleviate people's panic, and reduce the waste of resources, so as to maintain social stability.

2.2 Improve the mechanism for managing public health emergencies

It is a branch of perfecting the management mechanism of public health emergencies in China to build the governance mechanism of government response to public health emergencies, which can make the management and decision-making more scientific and effective, and has important guiding significance to the economic and social development of China. Discussing the quality mechanism of coping with public health emergencies from the government level can give full play to the government functions, mobilize the relationship between the government and the society and the market, accurately assess the emergencies, prevent panic, and improve the management mechanism system of public health emergencies in China.

2.3 Build a good image of the government

After the outbreak of COVID-19, Xi Jinping and the CPC Central Committee attached great importance to the lives of the people and put the safety of the people at the top of the epidemic prevention and control work. They

concentrated resources and made emergency deployment in the shortest possible time, quickly set up a leading group, centralized and unified leadership, and sent a central guidance group to Wuhan. As the leader in handling public health emergencies, the government should have a clear attitude and make resolute and forceful decisions. The strong actions of the government can give the people support, mobilize the people to actively cooperate with and participate in, and provide strength for the government to build a good image.

3. Improve the government's mechanism for dealing with public health emergencies

The COVID-19 epidemic is a test for the Chinese government's governance mechanism in response to public health emergencies. Since public health events triggered by infectious diseases will have a wide range of impacts in a short period of time, the response degree of the government's relevant governance mechanism determines the size of the impact. While doing a good job in the specific work of epidemic prevention and control, it is able and necessary to learn lessons and summarize experience from the perspective of government governance mechanism, improve the government governance mechanism for public health emergencies, establish a governance structure with clear responsibilities, and further improve the national emergency management system.

3.1 Strengthen information communication and improve the early warning mechanism

The outbreak of a large-scale epidemic and some false and untrue new transmission will inevitably cause panic among the people, resulting in the movement of people, which may lead to secondary transmission. Before the outbreak, the local government should make a comprehensive assessment and evaluation based on local information and the development of the epidemic area and personnel. After that, it should timely and accurately respond to the government at the next higher level, so as to take measures to release related early warning information, timely and accurately prevent the spread of the disease. The local government should embody social consensus, maintain social order, and save human, financial and resource for epidemic prevention and control to

the maximum degree.

3.2 Raise the level of medical treatment and improve the guarantee mechanism

Improving the government's guarantee mechanism for responding to public health emergencies is an important guarantee for epidemic prevention and control. The *National Emergency Plan for Public Health Emergencies* issued in 2006 mentioned that governments at all levels should establish a guarantee system for public health emergencies and reserve certain production materials. Local material reserves should be closely integrated with the epidemic prevention and control situation, coordinated production, demand, flow and distribution of all links, with the focus on improving the ability to match supply and demand of medical supplies to enhance the level of security. On the one hand, the government should strengthen the construction of hardware and equipment for the implementation of emergency measures, ensure the quality and quantity of human and financial resources, ensure the medical needs, and prohibit the interception of medical supplies. On the other hand, it should construct professional emergency personnel echelon, strengthen professional ability training, and improve the soft power of emergency management.

3.3 Improve assessment capability and complete follow-up recovery mechanism

After the outbreak of COVID-19, many prevention and control measures have been taken. It is necessary to organize experts to objectively assess the implementation of these measures, and timely find problems in the process of policy implementation, so as to provide practical support for further optimizing the government governance mechanism. Governments at all levels should establish a good political and economic recovery mechanism with clear rewards and punishments, clear responsibilities, accountability for those who fail to perform their duties during the epidemic, and provide relevant personnel with certain material or spiritual rewards, so as to create a good social environment. Since the beginning of the 21st century, various infectious diseases such as SARS, H5N1 and H7N9 have constantly endangered human health and are characterized by sudden outbreaks. In order to better strengthen epidemic prevention and control ability in the future, form the long-term social environment of public security, the government should

have a long-term development vision and strategic layout, not just confine their work to the current outbreak, but establish a perfect talent team, attach importance to material reserves and capital construction, encourage and support the medical institutions and scientific research personnel, to meet the needs of healthy development of the science, conform to infectious diseases' law of development, and prepare to long-term science and medicine^[4].

References

1. Zhang F, Sun Y. On public health emergency mechanism and the Chinese government's rule of law. *Journal of South China Normal University (Social Science Edition)* 2003; (5): 8–12.
2. Fang Y. On the active mechanism of local government treating with public crisis. *Academic Search for Truth and Reality* 2006; (4): 26–29.
3. Li L. Mechanism construction of government response to public health emergencies (in Chinese). *Jilin Provincial Society of Administration. Proceedings of the annual academic Conference of "Government Management Innovation and Transformation of Economic Development Mode"* of Jilin Provincial Society of Administration (*Jilin Zhengbao* 2010; S2). Jilin Institute of Public Administration: Jilin Institute of Public Administration; 2011. p. 115–116.
4. Wang D. Modernization of community governance: Functional orientation, dynamic mechanism and realization path (in Chinese). *Study and Practice* 2019; (7): 88–97.