

Abdul goes shopping for the family

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by Indian Scientists Response to Covid

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Indian
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Abdul woke up in a panic: Arre! I am going to be late for Ajit Sir's class again! He's definitely not going to let me sit for the final exam now!

He then sleepily realized there was a lockdown; college was closed and he was at his parents' home. He turned over to try to go back to sleep. The one room house was already bustling with activity—Ammi had started making tea for everyone, Dadi's knitting needles were already click-clacking, and Abba was doing his namaz. He might as well wake up, he thought, as he couldn't sleep through all this anyway!

As he brushed his teeth, Abdul thought about how much he missed the hostel room that he only had to share with his roommate Satish -- a room that was not much larger than his parents' house. He thought of the endless conversation about politics he would have over chai with friends. And the general sense of independence he felt when he was at college. They closed the college and hostels almost three weeks ago and he had to take two jam-packed trains and a three hour shared jeep ride to get home! It was a tense few days for everyone, and for a moment, he tried to relive the happiness he felt when he finally got home.



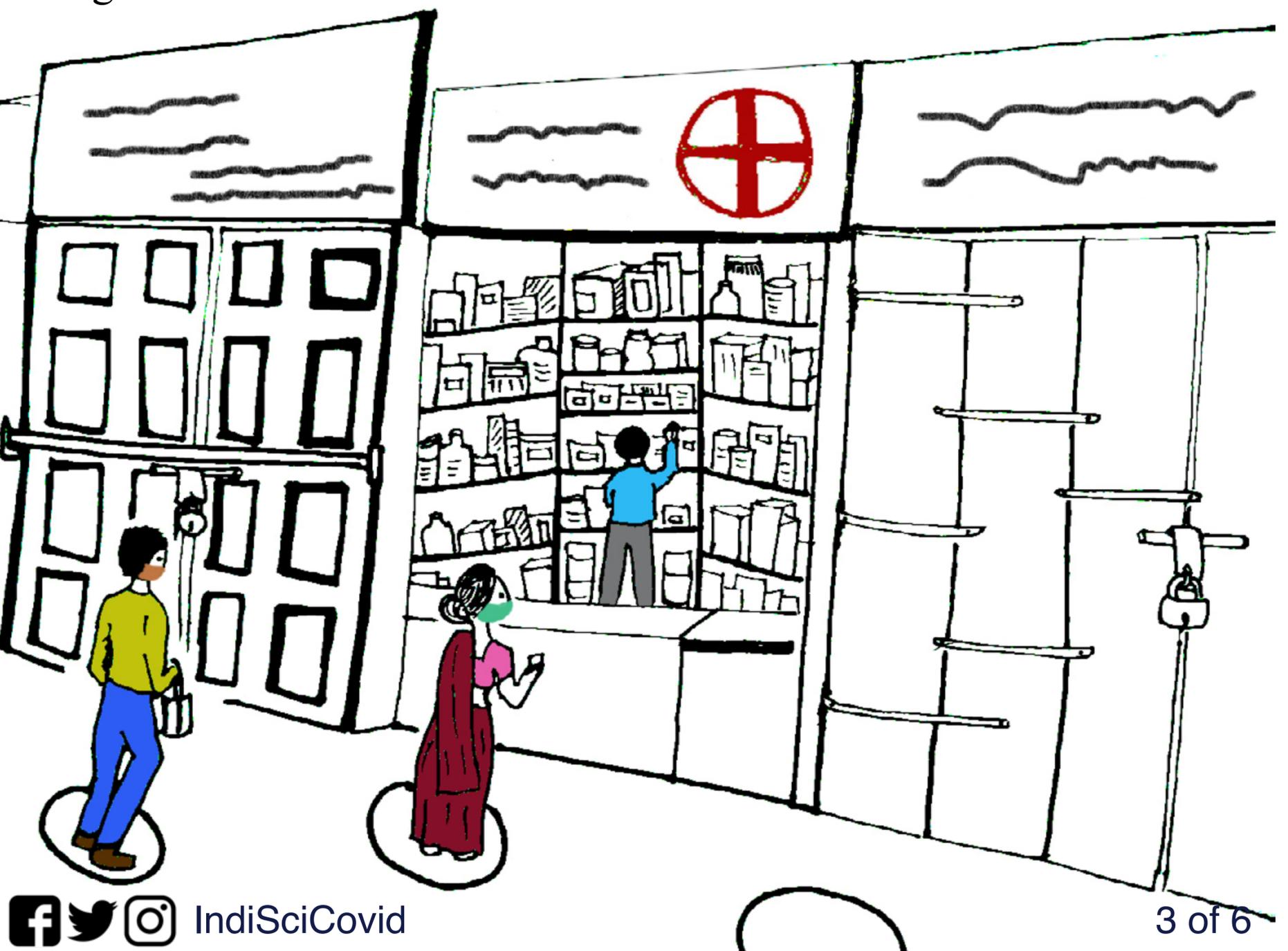
“Abdul, it’s so late. I told you I need mutton and tomatoes from the market today. Go get them soon! The shops will start closing,” shouted Ammi. “But be careful. Wear a mask. Don’t touch anything. Stay away from people...” Ammi had already started with her long list of precautions and instructions.

“I am almost out of my BP medicines. Can you check if the medical shop has got stock yet?” Dadi added.

“OK OK I’m going. But I am not going tomorrow. Or even for two more days after that. So tell me everything you want now!” Abdul replied.

“Beta, buy me a newspaper, no? Buy me tomorrow’s also if you can find it!” Abba added with his usual humour. Everyone, including Dadi, groaned. But they all know that his silly jokes were what was making this whole situation feel slightly normal.

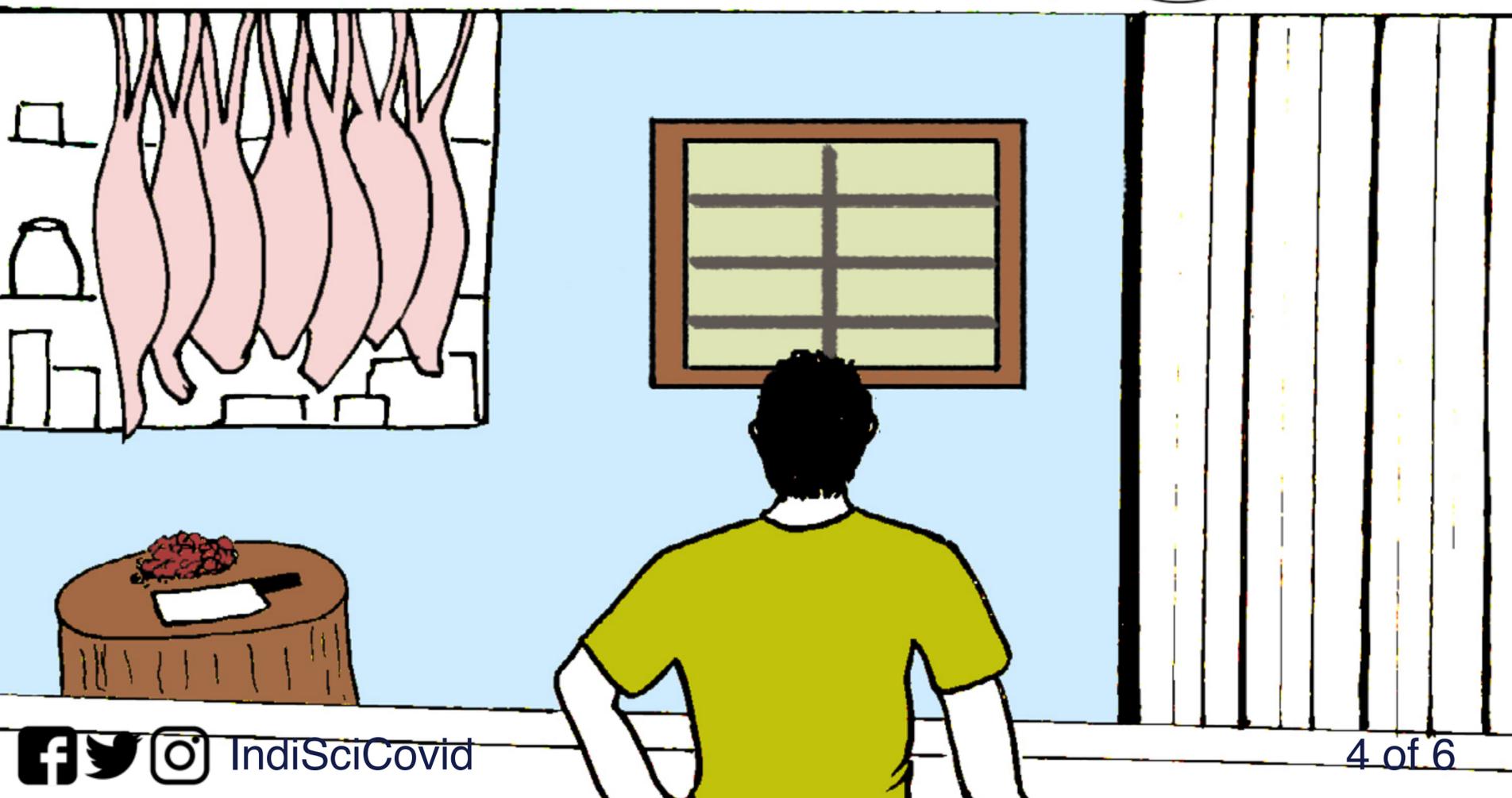
Abdul’s elder sister was out of the country, but would call every night and give them new instructions. She was the one who had designated Abdul as the person to go out of the house and get essentials. “Everyone else is old and is at a higher risk” she had said, adding “What else are you doing at home anyway?” Most recently, she had instructed him to wear a mask whenever he goes out.



Abdul picked up one of the washed masks that dadi had stitched out of an old dupatta. “Wear that shawl I’ve kept near the door for going out.” Ammi pleaded. “It’s too hot Ammi! I am not doing that anymore. I will just wash the clothes I am wearing out as soon as I get home.” said Abdul as he put his slippers and left.

Abdul waited in line in the round chalk markings, first outside the medical shop and then the vegetable shop. Good thing he still had an unlimited phone plan -- at least he could catch up with his friends from college while he waited.

He finally got to the butcher’s shop where there didn’t seem to be anyone else around at the moment. As Karim Chacha was cutting up the mutton, he shouted questions at Abdul from the back of the shop: “Everyone OK at home?” “When do you think this lockdown is going to end? You must be reading all the news on your phone, no? What are they saying?” Abdul put his phone away. It was nice to talk to someone in person outside his family, even if they were shouting across the shop, and even if the conversation was muffled by their masks. “Ya ya, everyone at home is well. Just a bit worried, that’s all. I don’t know about this lockdown Chacha! Seems like this is going to go on for a while. Not sure what the plan is!” Abdul replied. He lingered a few minutes more and chatted with Karim Chaha about the current economic scenario.



When Abdul got back home, Ammi had left a small mug of water, soap and a dry cloth outside the door. He removed his slippers, washed and wiped his hands. He then dipped the cloth in soapy water to wipe off the cardboard box of medication. She had also left a clean handkerchief and bottle of hand sanitizer which he used to wipe his phone. He had gotten a good scolding from Ammi last time he came back and had forgotten to do this. She had proceeded to threaten to take away his phone altogether.

He came in and handed the mutton and vegetables to Ammi. She started washing everything thoroughly before storing them away in their tiny fridge. He placed the medication box on a table, and then went to take a bath and wash his clothes and mask.



Abdul came back to the table, carefully opened the box of medication and transferred the pills into a small glass bottle. His Dadi was old and he was very worried about her getting CoViD-19. He threw the cardboard box into the dustbin near the main door. He then washed his hands and the outside of the bottle with soap to be extra careful to get rid of any remaining viruses before handing her bottle: “Here’s your medicine Dadi. The stock came yesterday.”

As he was hanging out his clothes to dry on the common balcony, he realized that he had forgotten Abba’s newspaper. Never mind, he thought, everyone will get to hear a few more of his jokes about it for the rest of the day.

These are meant to portray typical scenarios and contextualise the information we provide. Necessarily this simplifies the content. Please make sure that you go through the accompanying documents on the website for scientific accuracy.

