

Update on COVID-19: Advisories and Guidelines for Containment and Prevention

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Cabinet Secretary took a review meeting of concerned officials from various Ministries/Departments, here today. During the meeting, he emphasized on the implementation of Social Distancing measures as detailed by guidelines of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. He stated that social distancing would have a major impact in limiting the spread of the disease. He also reviewed preparedness of various states for quarantine facilities, hospital management and awareness campaigns.

In order to ensure effective and seamless coordination between the Centre and the States, 30 nodal officers of the level of Joint Secretary and above have been drawn from various Ministries to liaison, coordinate and help the States with respect to anything that is required from the Government of India. They will be deputed to the States, and shall work in close coordination with the State authorities for coordinating the preparedness and response measures. An orientation meeting of all the officers is being held tomorrow.

Secretary (HFW) has also written to the Secretaries of all Ministries/Departments, Govt. of India today requesting them to implement the various guidelines/advisories that have been issued and are applicable to them and the organizations under them.

In continuation of the travel advisory issued on 11th March, 2020 and 16th March, 2020, the following additional advisory is issued today:

- i. Travel of passengers from Afghanistan, Philippines, Malaysia to India is prohibited with immediate effect. No flight shall take off from these countries to India after 1500 hours Indian Standard Time (IST). The airline shall enforce this at the port of initial departure.
- ii. This instruction is a temporary measure and shall be in force till 31st March 2020 and will be reviewed subsequently.

In addition to this, three guidelines have also been issued (these are available at www.mohfw.gov.in):

Guidelines on Clinical Management of COVID-19 triage (early recognition of patients), implementation of infection prevention and control measures have been revised and updated.

Guidelines have been issued for Dead Body Management towards standard precautions, infection prevention and control measures, handling of the body and environmental disinfection.

Guidelines have also been issued for Private Sector Laboratories Intending to Initiate COVID-19 Testing.

Laboratory test should be only offered when prescribed by a qualified physician as per ICMR guidance for testing. Since the guidance evolves periodically, the latest revised version should be followed.

ICMR will share the SOPs for laboratory testing and provide positive controls for establishing the test as soon as the concerned private laboratory has procured the primers, probes and reagents as per SOPs. Adoption of commercial kits for testing should be based on validations conducted by ICMR-National institute of Virology (NIV), Pune.

Appropriate biosafety and biosecurity precautions should be ensured while collecting samples from a suspect patient. Alternatively, a disease specific separate collection site may be created.

All the private testing laboratories to ensure immediate/ real-time reporting to the State officials of IDSP (Integrated Disease Surveillance Program of Govt. of India) and ICMR HQ for timely initiation of contact tracing and research activities.

ICMR strongly appeals that private laboratories should offer COVID-19 diagnosis at no cost.

An advisory has issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) citing preventive measures to be taken by all employees of Ministries/ Departments to control the spread of COVID-19. All Ministries/ Departments have been advised the following:

Installation of thermal scanners at the entry of Government buildings, as feasible. Mandatory placing of hand sanitizers at the entry of Government buildings. Those found having flu-like symptoms may be advised to take proper treatment/quarantine etc.

Discouragement to the maximum extent, entry of visitors in the office complex. Routine issue of visitors/temporary passes should be suspended with immediate effect. Only those visitors whom have proper permission of the officer who they want to meet, should be allowed after being properly screened.

Meetings, as far as feasible, should be done through video conferencing. To minimize or reschedule meetings involving large number of people unless necessary.

Avoidance of non-essential official travel.

Undertaking essential correspondence on official email and avoid sending files and documents to other offices, to the extent possible.

Facilitating delivery and receipt of dak at the entry point itself of the office building, as far as practicable.

Closing all gyms/recreation centres/creches located in Government buildings.

Ensuring proper cleaning and frequent sanitization of the work-place, particularly of the frequently touched surfaces. Ensuring regular supply of hand sanitisers, soap and running water in the washrooms.

All officials may be advised to take care of their own health and look out for respiratory symptoms/fever and, if feeling unwell, should leave the workplace immediately after informing their reporting officers. They should observe home-quarantine as per the guidelines issued by MoHFW (available at the following URL: www.mohfw.gov.in/DraftGuidelinesforhomequarantine.pdf.)

The leave sanctioning authorities are advised to sanction leave whenever any request is made for self-quarantine as a precautionary measure.

Issuance of advisory to all employees who are at higher risk i.e. older employees, pregnant employees and employees who have underlying medical conditions, to take extra precautions. The Ministries/Departments may take care not to expose such employees to any front-line work requiring direct contact with the public.
