

Update on COVID-19: Preparedness and Actions taken

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Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) is now officially a global pandemic. With over 118,000 coronavirus cases sweeping across 114 countries of the world, the World Health Organization declared it a pandemic yesterday.

Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji is constantly monitoring and reviewing the situation with the top officials of the concerned Ministries/Departments and States/UTs since the first case was declared on 31st December 2019 in the city of Wuhan in China.

India's response was initiated on 8th January, much before WHO declared COVID-19 as a public health emergency on 30th Jan, 2020. States were directed for health sector preparedness on 17th Jan, 2020. Same day, point of entry surveillance was also initiated.

Various measures have been taken by the Central Ministries along with States/UTs in terms of strengthened community surveillance, quarantine facilities, isolation wards, adequate PPEs, trained manpower, rapid response teams for management of COVID-19. Screening at airports was started on 17th January at 3 airports (Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata) which was extended to 4 more airports (Chennai, Cochin, Bengaluru, Hyderabad) on 21st Jan, 2020 and subsequently extended to 30 airports. All incoming passengers are being universally screened at the 30 airports. Similarly, screening was initiated for vessels arriving at 12 major ports and 65 non-major ports.

India has always prioritized the safety and welfare of its citizens abroad and mounted timely evacuation of its citizens starting 1st February, 2020 from COVID-19 affected countries. So far, the Government of India has evacuated 900 Indian citizens along with 48 belonging to other nationalities like Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, US, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa and Peru.

In addition, 83 evacuees from Italy who arrived yesterday have been housed at Manesar facility for quarantine. All patients in the hospitals are being treated and reported to be stable.

On the directions of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, a high-level Group of Ministers was constituted to continuously monitor the situation and evaluate preparedness and formulate measures regarding management of COVID-19 in the country. The GoM has met 6 times so far, guiding, reviewing and monitoring the situation.

In view of the rapidly evolving situation, two meetings of the GoM were held yesterday. The GoM deliberated on various precautionary measures which may be considered in the interest of the citizens of India. Based on the recommendations of the Committee of Secretaries chaired by Cabinet Secretary, the GoM made some important decisions last evening which are as follows:

- All existing visas (except diplomatic, official, UN/International Organizations, employment, project visas) stand suspended till 15th April 2020. This will come into effect from 1200 GMT on 13th March 2020 at the port of departure.
- Visa free travel facility granted to OCI card holders is kept in abeyance till 15th April 2020.

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- OCI card holders already in India can stay in India as long as they want.
- Visas of all foreigners already in India remain valid and they may contact the nearest FRRO/FRO through e-FRRO module for extension/conversion etc. of their visa or grant of any consular service, if they choose to do so.
- Any foreign national who intends to travel to India for compelling reason may contact the nearest Indian Mission.
- In addition to Visa restrictions already in place, passengers traveling from /having visited Italy or Republic of Korea and desirous of entering India will need certificate of having tested negative for COVID-19 from the designated laboratories authorized by the health authorities of these countries. This is in enforcement since 0000 hrs. of 10th March, 2020 and is a temporary measure till cases of COVID-19 subside.
- All incoming travellers, including Indian nationals, arriving from or having visited China, Italy, Iran, Republic of Korea, France, Spain and Germany after 15th February, 2020 shall be quarantined for a minimum period of 14 days. This will come into effect from 1200 GMT on 13th March 2020 at the port of departure.
- Incoming travellers, including Indian nationals, are advised to avoid non-essential travel and are informed that they can be quarantined for a minimum of 14 days on their arrival in India.
- Indian nationals are further strongly advised to refrain from travelling to China, Italy, Iran, Republic of Korea, France, Spain and Germany.
- All incoming international passengers returning to India should self- monitor their health and follow required do's and don'ts as detailed by the Government.
- International traffic through land borders will be restricted to designated check posts with robust screening facilities. These will be notified separately by M/o Home Affairs.
- All international Passengers entering into India are required to furnish duly filled self-declaration form in duplicate (including personal particulars i.e. phone no. and address in India) to Health Officials and Immigration officials and undergo Universal Health Screening at the designated health counters at all Points of Entry.

As of now, 73 cases are confirmed for COVID-19. Three of these cases from Kerala have recovered and been discharged.

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