

Secretary, Consumer Affairs, Food & Civil Supplies reviews availability of essential commodities across states

States and Industry gear up for maintaining supplies

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The Secretary, Consumer Affairs, Food & Civil Supplies, Shri Pawan Agarwal reviewed the availability of essential commodities across different States and UTs during a video conference with senior officers. The Secretary advised the States & UTs to ensure there is no shortage of essential supplies including hygiene products such as hand sanitizers and masks that have been recently brought under the Essential Commodities Act, especially in areas where prohibitory orders are in force. He also asked them to constantly monitor prices of commodities under the EC Act. The Department has issued orders today to regulate them under fixed prices.

A few States have made available hygiene products such as hand sanitizers and face masks for sale through the PDS network. The Secretary advised that others States may also follow the model. Industry representatives have also shown interest in distributing such hygiene products at lower prices through the Fair Price Shops, he said.

The Secretary said the Centre has issued orders that States can lift foodgrains supplies for upto six months and pass on to retailers so that consumers can stock at homes. Punjab informed that they have surplus foodgrain stocks and godowns can offload to fulfil the demands of other states.

Senior officers from Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Daman, Goa, Haryana, J&K Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab and Uttarakhand participated in the video conference. State representatives informed the Secretary the States are not facing supplies shortage including that of fruits, vegetables and milk and have adequate stocks while ramping up production of hygiene products. Director, Civil Supplies, Kerala requested that since the State does not produce foodgrains, it may be ensured that truck movements carrying EC stocks are allowed from other states that have enforced travel restrictions. States/UTs were advised that transport of essential supplies including food and hygiene products across the States/UTs must be maintained. States/UTs could however put requirement and tracking of hygiene of drivers/helpers at the entry points.

Shri Agarwal asked States particularly Maharashtra, to ensure that couriers of ecommerce platforms are allowed to operate in big cities where restrictions on movement are in place. He also asked States to ensure stocks of Ethyl Alcohol, the major component in sanitizer sprays, are made available to deodorant manufacturers so that they can ramp up production. The Secretary also directed the States that biometric authentication for retail sales to consumers can be temporarily suspended in order to contain the spread of the Covid pandemic. The Department has a webpage on "JagoGrahak" for monitoring of EC supplies, price monitoring and publicising best practices, he said. Besides, the States and Consumers can also avail of Consumer Helpline to act swiftly against hoarding, shortages and other malpractices.

The Department of Consumer Affairs along with the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has issued a set of directions to manufacturers and retailers of hygiene products to ramp up production capacity and ensure fair distribution and retail, besides administering their prices. The Central Drugs Standard Control

Organisation(CDSCO) and Director, Legal Metrology through State Governments are monitoring the availability of sanitizers and masks and taking strict action against hoarding and sale above MRP.

APS/PK

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