

# High level Group of Ministers reviews current status, and actions for prevention and management of COVID-19

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The 8th high-level meeting of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on COVID-19 was held at Nirman Bhawan today and chaired by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare. Sh. Hardeep S. Puri, Minister of Civil Aviation, Dr. S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, Sh. Nityananda Rai, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Sh. Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare and Sh. Mansukh L. Mandaviya, Minister of State for Shipping, Chemicals & Fertilizers were present along with Cabinet Secretary Sh. Rajiv Gauba.

Ms. Preeti Sudan, Secretary (HFW), Sh. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Secretary (MEA), Sh. Pradeep Singh Kharola, Secretary (Civil Aviation), Sh. P.D. Vaghela, Secretary (Pharmaceuticals), Dr. Balram Bhargava, Secretary DHR & Director General ICMR, Sh. Ravi Capoor, Secretary (Textiles), Sh. Yogendra Tripathi, Secretary (Tourism), Sh. Sanjeeva Kumar, Spl. Secretary (Health), Sh. Sanjay Bandopadhyay, Addl. Secretary (Shipping), Sh. Dammu Ravi, Addl. Secretary (MEA), Sh. Anil Malik, Addl. Secretary (MHA), Sh. Anand Swaroop, Inspector General (ITBP), Dr. Rajiv Garg, DGHS, MoHFW, Sh. Lav Agarwal, JS (MoHFW) along with officials from the Armed forces, ITBP and other ministries were also present.

The Group of Ministers (GOM) had detailed deliberation on prevention and management of COVID-19 in the country. In continuation of ongoing steps taken in this direction, the Committee of Secretaries chaired by Cabinet Secretary, at its meeting today, analysed the current situation and gave its recommendation to the Group of Ministers (GoM).

The Group of Ministers reviewed the status of cases in India and the steps taken by the Government of India, so far. In addition to the travel restrictions and advisories already in place, GoM has decided that:

- No scheduled international commercial passenger aircraft shall take off from any foreign airport for any airport in India, after 0001 hrs GMT of March 22, 2020 (\*i.e. 0531 hrs Indian Standard Time (IST) of March 22, 2020). These instructions shall remain in force till 0001 hrs GMT of March 29, 2020.
- A maximum travel time of 20 hours is permissible for such commercial passenger aircraft to land in India.
- As such, no incoming scheduled international commercial passenger aircraft shall be allowed to disembark its passengers \*on Indian soil\* (Foreigner or Indian) after 2001 hrs GMT of March 22, 2020 (\*i.e. 0131 hrs IST of March 23, 2020).
- It is to be highlighted that these are temporary measures to restrict the spread of COVID-19, and will be reviewed by the Government.

Further, Government of India had issued a detailed advisory on social distancing measures as a non-pharmaceutical intervention on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Social distancing primarily implies avoiding/decreasing contact so as to stop or slow down the rate and extent of disease transmission. This has been found to be a useful approach to decrease the morbidity and mortality due to the disease. Government has regularly been urging Indian nationals on hand and respiratory hygiene, environmental sanitation measures like routine cleaning of frequently used surfaces, minimizing the sharing of objects; and ensuring appropriate ventilation besides social distancing.

As directed by the Group of Ministers, in continuation of already issued advisories, Department of Personnel and Training has issued instructions to reduce the contact and congestion in government offices.

According to the Office Memorandum:

- 50 per cent of Group B and C employees are required to attend office every day, and the remaining 50 per cent staff should be instructed to work from home.
- Weekly roster of duty should be drafted for Group B and C staff and they are to attend office on alternate weeks.
- Working hours for all employees who attend office on a particular day should be staggered.  
Details can be seen at the DoPT website;

[https://dopt.gov.in/sites/default/files/11013\\_9\\_2014\\_EsttAIII\\_19032020\\_English.PDF](https://dopt.gov.in/sites/default/files/11013_9_2014_EsttAIII_19032020_English.PDF)

Further, States shall issue instructions for regulating hours in all services except for essential services. Industrial establishments to consider staggered timings and regulation of crowd in market should also be resorted to.

States shall issue directions to private sector to consider work from home wherever feasible.

All educational institutions, theatres, museums, gyms, exam centers, etc., shall be closed temporarily.

States shall take necessary actions to ensure that all sporting events, competitions and religious gatherings shall be postponed and it shall be ensured that required social distanced is maintained even in smaller gatherings.

With respect to public transport, it is directed that metros, railways, buses and airplanes shall consider decrease in frequency of their services, alternate seating to ensure social distancing. Effective disinfection and crowd management be ensured in places like railway stations, metro stations, bus stands, and airports.

Railways have already issued orders in deference to GoM directions wherein travel concessions for senior citizens and all others availing concessional booking except for patients, students and divyangjan category since 0000 hours of 20 March 2020 have been temporarily suspended.

Further, in order to protect the most vulnerable of our population, all states shall issue appropriate instructions where in all citizens above 65 years except for public representatives/government servants/medical professionals should be advised to remain at home and avoid gatherings except for medical reasons and need for essential services.

Similarly, all children below 10 years of age should be advised to remain at home and avoid going to public parks, picnics and other games requiring large number of participants.

In consultation with medical professionals, detailed advisory shall be issued for all health establishments to avoid non urgent hospitalization and minimize elective surgeries. This is being done to avoid hospital related infections to the vulnerable and prepare hospitals for meeting challenges posed by COVID-19.

Youth and citizens are urged to become volunteers to support the government's ongoing efforts in management of COVID-19.

Ministry of Pharma and Consumer Affairs to take necessary action against anyone charging exorbitant price for masks, sanitizers, and other health related logistic material and to facilitate their availability in all hospitals and to people at large. They also directed that people should be sensitized on appropriate use of masks, to be utilized only when needed and to wash hands with soap.

It was emphasized that community should be aware of all the steps taken by government and to solicit their support in government efforts for managing COVID-19 disease.

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