

Health Ministry releases SOP on Preventive Measures in Markets to contain spread of COVID-19

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Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has issued Standard operating Procedures (SOPs) on the preventive and precautionary measures to be followed to contain the spread of COVID19 in the country. These are as follows:

1. Background

The Health Ministry in recognition of the fact that marketplaces are visited by large number of people for their daily needs, shopping, entertainment, and food has designed a protocol to contain the spread of COVID-19. Amid COVID pandemic, with gradual opening of economic activities, markets are witnessing high footfalls. Such large gatherings, without observance of COVID19 appropriate behaviour have the potential to spread Coronavirus disease.

2. Scope

This document outlines various generic precautionary measures to be adopted in addition to specific measures to be ensured at marketplaces to prevent spread of COVID-19. These guidelines shall be applicable to both retail and wholesale markets. Some of the bigger markets may also have malls/ hyper/ supermarkets in them.

For such establishments, the guidelines issued earlier by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (available at <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/4SoPstobefollowedinShoppingMalls.pdf>) shall apply.

For restaurants, with in marketplaces, the earlier guidelines issued by the Ministry (<https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/3SoPstobefollowedinRestaurants.pdf>) shall apply.

Similarly, for offices, religious places/ places of worship, training institutes, yoga institutes and gymnasiums, cinema halls/theatres and any other specific activities which are part of these markets or are situated within the market complex, specific guidelines issued from time to time by the Ministry shall be applicable.

Market places in containment zones shall remain closed. Only those outside containment zones will be allowed to open-up.

3. Protecting vulnerable populations

Persons above 65 years of age, persons with comorbidities, pregnant women, and children below the age of 10 years are advised to stay at home, except for essential and health purposes. Market Owners Associations shall be advised accordingly.

Employees who are at higher risk i.e. older employees, pregnant employees and employees who have underlying medical conditions must take extra precautions.

The Market Associations shall be advised that such persons should not be exposed to any front-line work requiring direct contact with the public.

4. Promoting COVID Appropriate Behaviour

Simple public health measures are to be followed to reduce the risk of COVID-19. These measures need to be observed at all times by shop and establishment owners, visitors, and workers.

These measures include:

- i. Physical distancing of at least 6 feet to be followed as far as feasible.
- ii. Use of face covers/masks to be made mandatory.
- iii. Practice frequent hand washing with soap (for at least 40-60 seconds) even when hands are not visibly dirty. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (for at least 20 seconds) can be made outside shops and other places wherever feasible.
- iv. Respiratory etiquettes to be strictly followed. This involves strict practice of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue /handkerchief / flexed elbow and disposing off used tissues properly.
- v. Self-monitoring of health by all and reporting any illness at the earliest to state and district helpline.
- vi. Spitting shall be strictly prohibited.
- vii. Installation & use of AarogyaSetu App shall be advised to all.

5. Maintaining healthy environment at marketplaces

In normal times, markets are usually crowded with high footfalls, suffer from lack of adequate sanitation amenities and have poor hygiene conditions. To prevent the risk of transmission of COVID, it is crucial that healthy environment is maintained at marketplaces.

This includes:

- i. Prior to resumption of daily activities, all work areas inside the shop shall be sanitized (using 1% Sodium Hypochlorite solution) by shop owners.
- ii. Cleaning and regular disinfection of frequently touched surfaces (door knobs/handles, elevator buttons, hand rails, chairs, table tops, counters, etc.) and floors, walls, etc. to be done before opening of shops, at the end of the day and at other appropriate times.
- iii. Entrance to the shops to have mandatory hand hygiene (sanitizer dispenser) arrangement.
- iv. Where cars are repositioned by parking lot employees, proper disinfection of steering, door handles, keys, etc. of the vehicles should be undertaken by the owner before the vehicle is used again.
- v. Public utility areas and open spaces shall be sanitized with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite solution. This shall be done on a regular basis.
- vi. Deep cleansing of the toilets, hand washing and drinking water stations shall be done at least 3-4 times daily.
- vii. The market associations shall facilitate maintaining healthy environment of public utility areas and open spaces through their own means and through local urban bodies/civic agencies.

Detailed guidelines are available at

<https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/Guidelinesondisinfectionofcommonpublicplacesincludingoffices.pdf>

6. Planning for COVID related appropriate behaviour at marketplaces

6.1 Self-regulating COVID appropriate behaviour in marketplaces

COVID appropriate behaviour in marketplaces may be self-regulated by Market Associations through a

number of measures such as:

- i. Creation of a Sub-Committee for each market to facilitate and monitor implementation of COVID appropriate behaviour in marketplaces (within shops and establishments as well as outside).
- ii. Mask dispensing kiosks at Government approved rates may be set up at entry points and parking lots.
- iii. Provision of distribution of free masks for those who cannot afford.
- iv. Establishing hand washing stations in public utility areas and ensuring availability of soap and water. Use of foot operated taps and contactless soap dispensers is recommended.
- v. Providing mass thermal screening provisions at the entry/ access points to the market.
- vi. Procuring thermal guns, sanitizers, disinfectants for sanitization of public utility areas.
- vii. Placement of IEC materials and signages regarding COVID appropriate behavior in prominent locations.

6.2 Ensuring COVID appropriate behaviour by Enforcement Agencies.

Where self- regulatory approach fails or lacks impact, the planning shall also entail taking enforcement actions, wherever warranted. This may include:

- i. Levying of fines/penalties on defaulters for not wearing mask/face cover, or for not following physical distancing norms.
- ii. Exploring the option of allowing markets/shops to open on alternate days
- iii. Closure of markets in case larger number of cases are getting reported which are found to be having epidemiological links with the market by the administration.

6.3 Planning for ensuring COVID appropriate behaviours by shop owners/utilities operating in the market

Owners shall ensure:

- i. Physical distancing of a minimum of 6 feet inside and outside the shops/utilities, specific markings on the floor may be made.
- ii. Queue management inside and outside the shops/utilities.
- iii. They shall deploy sufficient personnel to monitor the queue as per physical distancing norms.
- iv. Keep provision of triple layer masks/ face covers for clients entering shops/utilities without masks
- v. Provisioning of hand sanitizers at the entry of the shop/establishment for sanitizing the hands of the visitors. Thermal screening provisions, to the extent feasible, for monitoring of body temperature of workers and clients.
- vi. Suitable arrangements for contact-less payment, wherever applicable.

6.4. Ensuring ventilation

- i. As far as feasible, natural ventilation must be ensured and use of small enclosed spaces must be discouraged.
- ii. Circulation of outdoor air needs to be increased, as much as possible, by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods.
- iii. For air-conditioning/ventilation, of closed enclosures, the guidelines of CPWD shall be followed which emphasizes that the temperature setting of all air conditioning devices should be in the range of 24-300 C, relative humidity should be in the range of 40-70%, intake of fresh air should be as much as possible and cross ventilation should be adequate. Air handling unit needs to be cleaned prior to switching on.

6.5. Crowd management

Crowd density does not remain the same throughout. It usually peaks during evening hours on weekdays. On weekends and holidays, marketplaces are crowded for most of the day till late in the evening. Planning should specifically factor-in requirement for these peak days/ hours. Several strategies can be worked out by the law enforcing agencies in collaboration with Market Associations to manage crowd.

These include:

- i. Engaging Civil Defence volunteers/ Home Guards/ volunteers etc to regulate crowd.
- ii. Access control at parking lots for limiting vehicle entry.
- iii. Separate entry and exit, if feasible, with unidirectional flow of visitors.
- iv. Roads within the marketplaces may be made vehicle free (including cycle/ electricRickshaws) and secured only for pedestrians / bicycles as far as possible.
- v. Strict penal action against illegal parking on market roads may be taken by law enforcing authorities.
- vi. Vehicle may only be allowed to be parked in assigned parking lots. Proper crowd management in the parking lots and outside the premises – duly following physical distancing norms to be ensured.
- vii. CCTV monitoring may be considered to detect overcrowding.
- viii. Staggered time of shops/utilities thereby allowing them to remain open for longer duration may be explored.
- ix. Effective crowd management in specific cases of local metro rail stoppages at stations directly feeding into markets.
- x. Provision for online booking of groceries/ items and delivery at doorstep must be encouraged. The staff for home deliveries to be screened thermally by the vendors prior to allowing home deliveries.
- xi. Incentive / discounts for those who shop during non-peak hours may be considered.

6.6 Creating awareness

- i. Provisions must be made for display of Posters/standees/AV media on preventive measures against COVID-19 at prominent places in the market area. Do's and Don'ts also to be displayed at vantage points.
- ii. Recorded messages on precautionary measures and COVID appropriate behavior may be played through AV systems installed in the market premises.
- iii. The mobile application or website of the shops, if available, must display preventive measures for COVID-19 at their landing page. The website/ Mobile application shall inform the visitors on self-monitoring of health and not to visit the market if suffering from symptoms of Covid-19.
- iv. Display State Helpline numbers and also numbers of local health authorities at prominent places.

6.7. Making available COVID related supplies

- i. Appropriate arrangements for personal protection devices like face covers/masks, and other logistics like hand sanitizers, soap, sodium hypochlorite solution (1%) etc. shall be made available by shop owners for their employees as per requirements. The Market Associations shall procure the same for sanitization of public utility areas.
- ii. Provide an adequate supply of calibrated thermal guns.
- iii. Ensure availability of covered dustbins and trash cans in sufficient numbers to managewaste as per CPCB guidelines (available at: https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/Projects/BioMedical-Waste/BMWGUIDELINES-COVID_1.pdf)

7. Maintaining healthy operations at marketplaces

- i. Shop owners, employees and visitors living in containment zones shall not be allowed entry into marketplaces.
- ii. At the entry point of shops, all employees/ visitors to undergo mandatory hand hygiene (sanitizer dispenser) and thermal screening. Only asymptomatic employees /visitors shall be allowed inside shops.
- iii. All employees/visitors to be allowed entry only if using face cover/masks. The face cover/mask has to be worn at all times inside and outside shops.
- iv. Staggering of visitors to be done for maintaining physical distancing of a minimum of 6 feet, when queuing up at the time of entry.
- v. Number of customers inside the shop to be kept at a minimum, to maintain the physical distancing norms.
- vi. Seating arrangement inside shops, if any, to ensure 6 feet between chairs, benches etc. as far as feasible.
- vii. Number of people in the elevators shall be restricted, duly maintaining physical distancing norms. viii. Use of escalators with one person on alternate steps may be encouraged.
- ix. The shop keeper/ staff to perform handwash / use of hand sanitizer frequently

MV/SJ

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