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EMPLOYEE SAFETY INITIATIVES
OF PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY
DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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BACKGROUND

The Covid-19 crisis has been first and foremost, a new challenge to mankind. Thousands of health professionals are heroically battling the virus, putting their own lives at risk. Governments and industry are working together to understand and address the challenge, support victims and their families and communities, and search for treatments and a vaccine. To slow the spread of the virus lockdown was imposed, however the Government of India enlisted pharmaceutical manufacturing under essential services.. The industry acted swiftly and promptly – both to ensure continuity of medicine supplies to avoid drug shortages, and at the same time, ensure the safety of the workforce in manufacturing facilities and offices during the crisis.

The pharmaceutical industry has displayed its commitment towards meeting the challenges posed by Covid-19 by constantly maintaining a high level of engagement with the Government of India. The industry has wholeheartedly supported the implementation of measures suggested by the Government of India to contain the spread of Covid-19. The companies across the various pharmaceutical manufacturing hubs in India have been working together, right from the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, to share best practices in ensuring employee safety. The industry has collaborated with infection control experts and consultants to develop and implement Employee Safety and Wellbeing Guidelines across facilities and offices.

The objective of this document is to share the initiatives taken up by the pharmaceutical industry to ensure the safety and wellbeing of employees at manufacturing facilities and offices.

EMPLOYEE SAFETY RESPONSE STRATEGY

The pharmaceutical industry broadly adopted a three-step response strategy to ensure employee safety during the Covid-19 crisis:
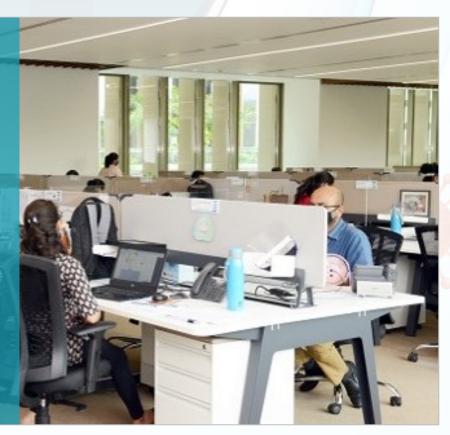
01 Rapidly establishing coordination and operational support with the Government of India

02 Implementing and scaling up employee safety protocols

03 Refining and sustaining the employee safety protocols in coordination with the industry and Government of India

The key steps to effectively implement the Covid-19 employee safety protocol were:

    A. Identification and assessment of the risk factors

    B. Implementation of mitigation measures

A. Risk identification and assessment

Covid-19 spreads mainly by droplets produced because of coughing or sneezing of an infected person. This can happen in two ways:

> **Direct close contact:** Covid-19 can spread by being in close contact with infected patients especially if they do not cover their face when coughing or sneezing.

> **Indirect contact:** The droplets survive on surfaces and clothes for many days. Therefore, touching any such infected surface or cloth and then touching one's mouth, nose or eyes can transmit the disease

I. The pharmaceutical industry rapidly established coordination with the Government of India, infection control and health experts as well as the ancillary industries to develop risk identification and assessment protocol for facilities and offices settings. The key risks identified in workplace settings were as follows:

II. Close contact transmission due to physical proximity among workers on the floor as well as in common areas
> Respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes
> Respiratory droplets on common surfaces

III. Delayed identification of potentially infected employees
> Facilities having low proximity to organised healthcare providers
> Adequate contact tracing and management

IV. Isolation and medical management of potentially infected employees

V. Transmission through external sources such as raw materials vendors, service engineers etc.

VI. Adequate Covid-19 safety protocol training at all levels

VII. Access to enablers such as transportation and safe accommodation for traveling employees

VIII. Financial and medical insurance situation of employees

IX. Spread of misinformation amongst employees through unverified sources

X. Adverse mental health situation created due to the stress of the Lockdown

B. Risk mitigation measures

The pharmaceutical industry recognised the importance of segmentation of risk mitigation measures and initiatives into different levels to ensure total coverage of all risk factor:

I. Personnel Level

II. Workplace Level

III. Organisational Level

IV. Employee Enablers

V. Other Initiatives

I. PERSONNEL SAFETY INITIATIVES

TO REDUCE RISK OF CLOSE CONTACT TRANSMISSION:

A.   Social Distancing

01

Creation of markers to indicate and ensure maintenance of physical distance of 6 feet in common areas such as main gate, canteen, changing room and workstations

02

Canteen Tables and chairs arranged in a manner to ensure social distancing

03

Buses for employees were run at 50% capacity allowing one employee on each seat to ensure the maintenance of physical distance

B. Shift bubble concept and shift isolation at changeover

- ➤ Zero interaction between employees of different shifts during changeover period

- ➤ Complete sanitization of workplace before allowing next shift employees to enter

- ➤ Increase in shift hours coupled with reduced number of workdays leading to reduction in daily shift changes and exposure of employees to vectors beyond their shift bubble

TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION THROUGH RESPIRATORY DROPLETS

A. Provision of PPE: Disposable protective gear such as face masks, face shields, gloves, etc. provided to all employees including service personnel with higher chances of exposure E.g. Occupational Health Centre staff, security guards, Food handlers in canteen, drivers etc.

B. Enforcement of mask policy: Mandatory mask policy for all employees present in the facility

C. Contactless sanitation stations: Contactless sanitization stations placed at various locations across sites. Eg. Entrance areas, washrooms, access control points, canteen etc.

D. Hand wash and sanitization facility: Hand washing and sanitization for all employees at various locations within the facility

TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION ON COMMON SURFACES

A. Contactless Attendance: Showcard/QR code attendance in lieu of fingerprinting attendance to reduce touching of surfaces

SCREENING AND EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIALLY INFECTED EMPLOYEES

A. Thermal screening:

➤ Temperature checks prior to onboarding bus / entering facility using IR gun

➤ Use of technology such as infrared cameras to gauge body temperature from a safe distance at main entrance to the offices and manufacturing plants

➤ Additional temperature checks at entry points to common areas such as cafeteria

B. Health status reports:

➤ Tracking of employee health parameters and maintenance of records with the help of apps such as HCA 'Health Care Application'

C. Employee Screening:

➤ Mandatory screening of employees returning from long absence, joining post illness or post recovery

II.   WORKPLACE SAFETY INITIATIVES

TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION ON COMMON SURFACES:

A.   Area Sanitization

01
Regular cleaning and sanitization of work areas, surfaces (e.g.: Desk/ tabletops/ door pull knobs/ handles, staircase railing etc.) and objects (telephones, keyboards) disinfected twice a day with 70% IPA solution

02
Areas contacted by potentially infected employees is thoroughly sanitized three times a day for 2 days by using 1% Minncare and 70 % IPA solution

03
Deep sanitization of peripheral areas at weekly interval

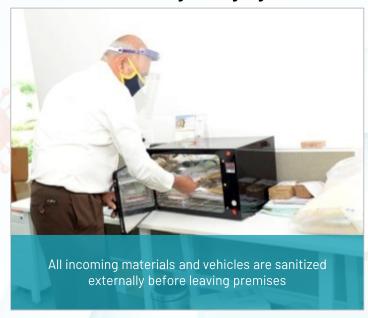### TO REDUCE RISK OF CLOSE CONTACT TRANSMISSION:

A.   Verification via Aarogya Setup app: Aarogya setu app of every employee is checked at entrance gate. Only employees with verified assessment on the Aarogya setu app are allowed to enter

B.   Incident and Observation Management Tracker: Employee trackers including parameters such as social distancing, random checking, illness, vendor contact, workstation sanitization status, awareness and training, instances of policy violation and interstate movement

C.   Camera Monitoring and Gemba Walk: All the areas and departments in a facility are checked for Covid-19 safety protocols compliance through random camera monitoring and gemba walks

TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TRANSMISSION THROUGH EXTERNAL SOURCES

A. Sanitisation of incoming and outgoing materials and vehicles:

All incoming materials and vehicles are sanitized externally before leaving premises

Pass box maintained in the premises for the de-contamination of the courier/bills & other parcels using the UV light

III. ORGANISATIONAL SAFETY INITIATIVES

IMPLEMENTATION OF COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS AND TRAINING

A. Covid-19 protocol

- ➢ Protocol for "Best Practices – Employee Safety during Covid-19 crisis" implemented across organisations based on the study of comprehensive practices being deployed across Indian and global manufacturing companies in response to the Covid-19 crisis

- ➢ Protocol to handle positive Covid-19 cases in manufacturing facilities which has been endorsed by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has been implemented across facilities

- ➢ Guidelines on containment of spread of Covid-19 in workplace settings created in collaboration with the Government of India and implemented across facilities

- ➢ Guidelines for start-up and operation of air conditioning and ventilation system in offices and workplace settings during Covid-19 implemented across facilities

B. Contact management:
Instituted response teams within facilities for appropriate contact tracing and management of Covid-19 Cases

C. Vendor Management Policy: Implemented policy for Vendor visits with proper protocols enforced

FINANCIAL AND MEDICAL INSURANCE SUPPORT TO EMPLOYEES

A. Direct Financial Support: Daily inconvenience allowance was paid to every individual present in the premises during lockdown

B. Health insurance: Health insurance policy of all employees was modified to include the treatment of Covid-19

C. Special Leave: Potentially / confirmed infected employees and identified contacts were given special leave with wages

EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIALLY INFECTED EMPLOYEES

A. Covid-19 test kits at facilities: Provision of Rapid Antigen and Antibody tests at facilities for early identification and medical management of potentially infected employees

B. Inhouse OHC care / Ambulance / Tie up with nearby clinics

➢ Manufacturing facilities provided with inhouse OHC with trained Doctors / nurses. Other offices / facilities have trained personnel to handle such situations

➢ Collaboration with nearby clinics and healthcare facilities

EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND AWARENESS TO COUNTER THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION

A. Training modules created and delivered to all employees:

➢ Training sessions for all employees and contract workers supervised by professionals imparted both through digital platforms as well as onsite trainings

➢ Informative and visual awareness poster displayed at various place in the factory premises

➢ Videos on Covid-19 precautions made and distributed to employees and displayed continuously on various screens throughout the facilities

HAVE YOU WORN YOUR MASK AND FACE SHIELD TODAY?

20 seconds that could save your life

Use soap and water more often to prevent catching and spreading coronavirus

LET'S STAY HEALTHY

IV. EMPLOYEE ENABLERS

ACCESS TO ENABLERS SUCH AS SAFE TRANSPORTATION AND ACCOMMODATION FOR TRAVELING EMPLOYEES:

A. Transportation facilities to plants

Provision of safe private transport facilities (buses, vans etc.) to workers to enable regular and safe commute to facilities

Fixed distanced seating arrangement in transport facilities to prevent contamination

B. Provision of e-passes: Provision of necessary passes to allow for inter-district and inter-state travel for employees when needed during lockdown

C. Accommodation for employees: Accommodation provided to workers travelling across state borders

TO REDUCE RISK OF CLOSE CONTACT TRANSMISSION

A. Online trainings / meetings / conference: Wherever possible online meetings / trainings are encouraged in the premises

B. Work from home: Work from home facilities for those employees who are not required to be physically present at workplace

V. OTHER INITIATIVES

COMMUNITY SUPPORT INITIATIVES:

SAFETY is our prime concern

Safety measures at Home:
- Please keep six feet distance from others.
- Avoid touching common contact surfaces.
- Please open doors with your elbow and avoid touching door or door handle.
- Do not share items like towels, cutlery, glasses, cup, electronic gadgets etc.
- Wash clothes, bed linen and towels frequently.
- Avoid gatherings, visit to public places and avoid visitors at home.
- While purchasing grocery/vegetables and medicine, go cashless and maintain safe distance.
- Keep monitoring your health status and in case of a fever, cough or cold, please consult a doctor. Also please keep track of COVID infections in your neighbourhood. In case of house help, please guide them on the symptoms and ask them to keep a track of COVID cases in their families or neighbourhood.

- **Precautionary measures before leaving home:**
- Always wear mask before leaving home.
- Do not touch your face until you have washed your hands.
- Wash your hands or sanitise them after touching any object.
- Inform the HR, if you have cold/cough/fever before or while leaving from home or if you are taking any medicines to control your fever

Safety measures while returning back home:
- Enter the house without touching anything.
- Keep your belongings like (car keys, pen, sanitizer bottle, employee ID card and phone) in a box outside the door and spray sanitizer on them, wipe them and take them inside.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap water.
- It's advisable to have a bath.
- Wash your clothes and dry them under sunlight.

A.   Awareness Webinar:

Webinars arranged for communities to improve the awareness on COVID-19 and other diseases

B.   Corporate Social Responsibility: Donation/distribution of PPE kits, N95 mask and medicines to Govt Hospitals, Covid-19 centres, health professionals and police departments across country. Food donation to needy, migrant labourers during lockdown.

C.   Providing Immunity Booster to communities

- ➢ Immunity booster provided to all employees during the entry/exit of a shift to strengthen the immunity of the company employees and their families
- ➢ Multivitamin tablets distributed to all employee and their families as immunity booster
- ➢ Ayurvedic brew (Kadha) served at community gatherings

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS CAUSED DUE TO THE LOCKDOWN

A. Organized online engagement events for employees such as Singing, playing musical instruments, Eco-friendly Ganpathi, Photo with Pet etc.

B. Webinar and counselling sessions addressing the mental stresses caused in families due to the lockdown

C. At-home physical exercise and yoga exercises modules shared with employees

CONCLUSION

During these trying times, it is critical for the pharmaceutical sector to continue producing lifesaving medicines and innovate vaccines, drugs and treatment protocols that can potentially save lives. Over 130 countries in the world depend upon India for the supply of medicines. Government-Industry collaboration to streamline, clarify and implement safety protocols on the ground in addition to the "around the clock" engagement between the Government and the pharmaceutical industry to resolve issues in manufacturing operations, logistics and functioning of the ancillary industries were instrumental in ensuring the complete recovery of manufacturing operations by end-May.

The Government's focussed efforts on health and safety resonated with the industry's primary focus to ensure the creation of a safe working environment for the employees. This inspired the confidence within the employees to attend their shifts and discharge their duties in the facilities. The pharmaceutical industry acknowledges the relentless efforts of all the employees involved in ensuring the sustained access to high quality medicines in the country and across the world.