

MTal urges states to implement Centre's order on free movement of medical devices

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Medical Technology Association of India (MTal), which represents research-based medical technology companies that have a large footprint in manufacturing, R&D and healthcare worker training in India, is in constant engagement with the government to tackle the current COVID-19 situation in India.

Pavan Choudary, MTal Chairman and Director General said, "Till the time a vaccine is developed, medical technology will shoulder the fight against COVID-19 as coronavirus patient management will almost exclusively depend on medical devices such as ventilators, haemodynamic monitors, respirators, catheters, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), imaging, and diagnostics until recovery."

As this pandemic has spread across countries, paralyzing economies and healthcare systems, availability of medical devices such as ventilators, N95 masks, diagnostic kits, PCR kits and infrared thermometers is falling short of requirements. "We need to think out of the box and come up with suitable and readily available alternatives to handle the shortages. MTal is engaged with the government at the highest levels to share its knowledge of such substitutes and emerging global protocols," said Mr Choudary.

In the current situation, quick movement of medical equipment is paramount for timely diagnosis, monitoring and treatment of patients suffering from COVID-19 and other critical ailments. However, manufacturers and distributors of crucial medical devices are facing several logistical challenges due to restrictions on inbound passenger flights and as well as movement of vehicles between cities and states.

Sanjay Bhutani, MTal Director said, "Most medical devices are shipped through international passenger flights. However, with flight restrictions in place, such shipments have to solely depend on cargo flights. As a result of this, cargo clearances have slowed down and a huge backlog is witnessed at customs. MTal has been engaged with the government ever since the first

sparks of the virus flew. The Central Government understands the critical role of medical devices in COVID-19 management. Various central ministries have initiated supportive actions.”

“The Secretary, Department of Pharmaceuticals has expeditiously sent a letter to Chief Secretaries of all states exempting medical device operations from the lockdown (enclosed in annexure). However, either the state machinery is not as agile as the Centre or is confused by different directives related to varied industries. This is why the industry is still facing several crippling issues that are impacting movement of vital medical devices, equipment and diagnostics,” added Mr. Choudary.

The directive given by the government to apply for individual passes for employees is a tedious process and will take up precious time which can be alternatively invested in manufacturing, supply and service operation of these essential products.

The lockdown is majorly affecting courier agencies like Bluedart, SafeExpress, and FedEx which are not allowed to move freely even while carrying medical devices. If the logjam continues, hospitals could face an acute scarcity of medical devices very soon.

To avoid a crisis and preserve the medical supply chain, MTal requests government’s urgent intervention to ensure the following:

1. Preferential customs clearance for inbound cargo of medical devices having HSN code 9018, 9019, 9020, 9021 and 9022.
2. Exemption for medical device workers and service engineers from lockdown/curfew based on self-declaration of identity and adherence to safety measures.
3. Directions to police and other authorities who are managing border check posts to allow movement of courier companies who carry medical devices to hospitals and diagnostic centres.