

# **RESTARTING ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AFTER LOCKDOWN AND PROTECTING STAKEHOLDERS**

(Dr. Shyam Pingle and Dr. Anish Sinha)

Covid19 pandemic is an unprecedented situation all over the world. Unfortunately, it does not look like a short term problem but an issue lasting many months or even few years and affecting various aspects of our life. Government's priority would be to restart economic activities on priority. Unfortunately, education sector seems to be low in priorities. Further, large gatherings and groups are seen as sources of spreading the infection. Life is going to change and is going to be different after the advent of Covid 19 in all walks of life including educational institutions.

By now, we all know that Covid 19 is caused by new Corona virus and it is transmitted from person to person. Today, our life is global and the whole world is connected by work, by trade and even by leisure. The disease was brought from Wuhan to India by the travellers visiting India and by the Indians visiting other countries. And it was spread further mostly by people travelling within the country. As on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020, India has detected more than 131000 cases of Covid19 with about 3900 citizens dying from the disease.

We need to take a look at some important aspects before, during and after restarting the academic institutions. We need to take actions to protect all stakeholders from getting infection at workplace and also to protect continuity of business by keeping the institution running.

## **Basics of the disease and transmission**

Corona has become the most important challenge at the workplace due to its long course of illness, possibility to spread the infection to more individuals, significant morbidity and mortality. The challenge has become formidable due to the presence of carrier stage ie an infected individual who has no symptoms but has ability to infect others. The disease is transmitted by droplets, physical contact and by fomites via contaminated objects and surfaces. The virus can survive for different periods on different surfaces from a few hours in most cases to three days in rare conditions.

Fever, dry cough, exhaustion, shortness of breath, headache, sore throat are common symptoms. New symptoms like loss of smell and loss of taste are reported. It takes anything between 4 to 14 days (average 5 days) to develop the symptoms after getting the infection. Infected persons transmit the infection about two days before the onset of symptoms and up to 10 days after. Almost 50% of the infected persons may never show any symptoms.

## **Prerequisites to start the Institution**

Guidelines and advisories from various government agencies, education ministry and University Grants Commission (UGC) should be reviewed and followed while reopening the institute. They are ‘work in progress’ and keep getting updated regularly as the situation evolves. The institute must prepare a comprehensive plan and the guidelines should cover all stakeholders; faculty, staff, students and contract workers.

The management needs to conduct a thorough risk assessment before restarting the institute. Infection levels in the society, transport of stakeholders to and fro from home to institute need to be reviewed carefully. A proper communication needs to be sent regarding new ways of work, change in practices and precautions to be followed. Guidelines and best practices for personal hygiene, cleaning and disinfection, physical distancing, and wellness should be followed.

Institute needs to be made ready for occupancy by thorough sanitization, layout changes for social distancing, additional hygiene facilities and health screening at entry to the campus. Advisories from the local government as well as international agencies like ILO, WHO and other credible organizations should be studied and implemented as applicable. IEC materials regarding COVID to be displayed at prominent places within the campus.

Risk Communication, sustained training and education and protective PPE such as masks in sufficient quantity, need to be ensured before re-opening the campus. Masks are essential for health protection for all individuals. Have a plan of action ready if an individual turns Corona positive including quarantine arrangements. It will be a good strategy to start with final year students and gradually increase to other batches as situation improves. High risk faculty and staff (those above 65 years, those with uncontrolled diseases and with respiratory / other comorbidities) should initially work from home and be the last to come in to work at the Institute. Also staff and students residing in containment area and red zone should not attend the institute till they complete quarantine. Residential accommodation on premises may be provided for critical stakeholders where possible.

## **Avoidable practices**

Disinfection tunnels were installed at some places. Various government agencies in India as well as international experts have decried the use of such disinfection tunnels. The Health Ministry has strongly advised against spraying of chemical disinfectants on individuals or groups as it could cause physical and mental harm. The advisory said methods such as spraying of disinfectants could lead to a false sense of safety and actually hamper public observance to hand washing and social distancing measures.

Spraying disinfectant on the streets, as practised in some countries, does not eliminate the novel coronavirus and even poses a health risk, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned.

There are no preventive drugs and care should be taken to boost immunity by adopting healthy diet and avoiding harmful habits.

### **Institute entry & exit**

Proper arrangements need to be made for smooth entry to ensure social distancing and hygiene norms. Most guidelines mandate a no touch body temperature check before entering and while exiting. Since there are more chances of interpersonal contact, entry and exit should be separate. Entry / attendance should be made contactless to the extent possible. It is advisable to avoid public transport and use personal vehicles or institute transport where possible. Social distancing norms are required during travel also. Organizations may consider issuing thermometers or motivating students & staff to procure them.

Authorities have mandated a gap of at least one hour between the shifts wherever possible to avoid overcrowding and reduce the chances of cross infection.

Extra precautions be taken by limiting visitors and contact information of all visitors should be preserved in the event someone develops Covid19 and contact tracing is indicated.

### **Safety and hygiene at the campus**

Indoor environment quality and ventilation should be monitored meticulously especially with changes in cleaning and housekeeping practices. All premises, especially contact points, should be regularly sanitized.

#### Campus Sanitation

Thorough and frequent sanitization of the whole campus including hostels is essential. Special attention should be given to common areas such as class rooms, meeting rooms, rest rooms, lifts, staircases etc. Frequency of cleaning needs to be increased manifold. Sterilize all boxes, wrappings and machinery brought into the institute. However, a WHO report says that spread of corona virus infection through fomites is uncommon in non-healthcare area.

Surfaces should always be cleaned with soap and water or a detergent to remove organic matter first, followed by disinfection. High-touch surfaces should be identified for priority disinfection. These include door and window handles, kitchen and food preparation areas, counter tops, bathroom surfaces, toilets and taps, and work surfaces. Freshly prepared Sodium hypochlorite (bleach) may be used at a recommended concentration of 0.1% (1000 ppm) for floor and major surfaces. Alternatively, alcohol with 70%-90% concentration may be

used for surface disinfection. Follow instructions from the manufacturer for touchscreen personal devices, personal computer keyboards or alcohol spray may be used.

### **Canteen hygiene**

Canteen is a place with high potential of cross infection. Increase the lunch hours and stagger lunch time to reduce the crowd and observe social distancing norms. Food items and serving practices should be improvised to reduce the frequency of contact. Kitchen areas should be cleaned and disinfected frequently at least once before every shift and dining areas before every service.

### **Hostels**

Should be cleaned daily and regular sanitization of common toilets/ corridors etc. Common rooms (like TV rooms, leisure rooms) should be closed temporarily, at least for a period of 3 months. Informal gatherings to be avoided by the students. COVID related IEC materials to be displayed at all prominent locations in the hostel campus. This will help to reduce complacency in the medium to long term.

Institutes should adhere to strict policy, to not to allow any person including family members/ relatives of students to enter hostel campus.

### **Classroom arrangements**

Usually classrooms are packed to the capacity and social distancing shall become a formidable challenge. Teaching practices need to be reviewed and improvised to ensure social distancing norms and reduce risk wherever possible. Innovative and out of box solutions are necessary to tackle this unprecedented situation. Classroom teaching may be aided by online teaching. Consider conducting online teaching using internet and following it up by classroom discussion limited to revision and clearing doubts where possible. Large classes may be split in smaller sections. Larger classrooms may be used where available. Consider introducing shifts where possible.

### **Examinations**

While the sanctity of academic expectations and integrity of examination process to be uppermost, no compromise on Safety & Health of the students should be done. Option of online examination be considered wherever possible. Decision should be made keeping in view the support system available and ensuring fair opportunity to all students. UGC guidelines also allow shortened examination or evaluation on the basis of internal evaluation and performance in the past examination. Deemed attendance should be given to the students for the period of lockdown as advised by UGC.

## **Library**

Working hours of the library should be increased and visiting hours should be staggered as possible. Social distancing should be observed strictly. Short term issue of books may be suspended for a few months. Library should subscribe to digital versions of the books and periodicals as possible and make them available to the students on their devices to the extent possible.

## **Air conditioners and ventilation systems**

The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) shared the guidelines to address concerns associated with the spread of the COVID-19 via air conditioners and ventilation systems. The guidelines were compiled by the Indian Society of Heating Refrigerating and Air Conditioner Engineers (ISHRAE). It said that the “best action” to limit It said that air-conditioner spaces which have remained closed during the lockdown will need maintenance for both engineering and health safety.

It is advised to set room temperature between 24 and 30 degrees Celsius (closer to 24C in humid climate and closer to 30C in dry climate. Maintain a relative humidity between 40 and 70 per cent. Keep the windows slightly open or use exhaust to accompany the recirculation of AC's cool air with outdoor air intake. Keep the room ventilated even when ACs are not running. The windows should be partly kept open while using electric fans. If the room has an exhaust fan, it should be switched on for better ventilation.

For commercial and industrial facilities, the mechanical exhaust air shall be 70 to 80 per cent of the fresh air quantity to maintain necessary positive pressure in the space.

## **Student Welfare activities**

### **Sports**

Sports activities can begin by maintaining all precautions including following social distancing norms and hand hygiene. Students can play the sports in rotation to avoid gathering. There should not be any spectators or gatherings to watch the sports.

### **Health and Hygiene**

All stakeholders should monitor their own health. They should be given sustained education and training to identify ill health and encouraged to stay home if not feeling well. Daily roll call of symptoms is desirable.

A medical retainer may be engaged if not existing. There should be an isolation room / area where a student/staff becoming sick can be isolated.

If an employee has fever and cough at home, he/she should not come to the institute but contact his/her family doctor. Most local government bodies are running fever clinics where treatment can be sought. Their advice should be followed for further treatment and testing as required.

The list of nearby medical facilities and governmental health centres should be made accessible to all and displayed prominently. All employees and students, especially outstation students, should be compulsorily provided medical insurance. Institute should have contact with government or private sector testing facilities for Corona virus disease after doctor's examination and advise.

### **Personal hygiene**

Use of mask, frequent handwashing/hand sanitizers and social distancing is the most important and effective trinity for every stakeholder at all levels. Mask should be changed frequently and cloth mask be washed daily. Institute and home clothing should be kept separate and washed frequently. Appropriate and sufficient handwashing facilities should be created / hand sanitizers provided to ensure easy access without long waiting period.

Tobacco in any form increases the vulnerability of the individuals and also increases the spread of infection. Therefore, ban on tobacco, gutkha, smoking and other habits should be strictly implemented.

### **Appointment of COVID Prevention Focal Person (CPFP):**

A senior faculty should be appointed as CPFP, to plan, oversee and supervise all activities related to COVID in the Institute. He/she should have support from a multifunctional team drawn from cross section of internal stakeholders.

Responsibility of CPFP will include executing the plan, liaison with the government authorities including health department, training of all students/ faculties/staff of the institutes regarding COVID, its transmission and prevention measures to be followed by all. He will establish system to support the students/ faculty/staff in case they develop any symptoms for further actions.

### **When not to come to the Institute**

As the lockdown is over, all faculty, RAs and staff are expected to work from the institute. However, all are requested to avoid visiting the institute under the following circumstances. They may work from home if otherwise fit, with concurrence from the Director/Supervisor:

- 1) Suffering from Respiratory infections, any symptoms suggestive of Covid infection in consultation with family doctor.

- 2) Diagnosed or suffering from COVID-19.
- 3) Household / Family member/ close contact diagnosed of COVID-19.
- 4) Self / family members staying with employees are put under quarantine/ isolation.
- 5) Residing in a containment/micro-containment zone.
- 6) Any criteria as per GOI/GOG guidelines which necessitates them to avoid coming to the institution.

Any supporting documentary evidence or self-declaration or information to HR with a copy to director in this regard and the duration for not coming to the Institution may be sent to the Director and administration with approval from immediate superior.

To conclude, every stakeholder should make oneself aware of all the above factors. Get all doubts clarified from superiors and cooperate by monitoring own health, complying with directions and adopting new practices. Never forget Mask, Hand hygiene/Sanitizer and Social Distancing for a safe campus.

**Address for communication:**

**Dr. Shyam Pingle**

Sr. Occupational Health Specialist & Adjunct Professor,

**Indian Institute of Public Health Gandhinagar**

**Gandhinagar - 382042, Gujarat,**

Email - [shyampingle@iiphg.org](mailto:shyampingle@iiphg.org), [drshyampingle@gmail.com](mailto:drshyampingle@gmail.com)

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