

Health & Insurance

Experts caution source segregation of waste and safety equipment for municipal workers must to contain COVID19

Our Bureau, Mumbai

Wednesday, March 25, 2020, 10:30 Hrs [IST]

Ensuring segregation of waste at source can drastically reduce dumping of waste in landfills and oceans, will also play a crucial role in containing COVID19, feels leading environmentalists, scientists and medical doctors in India.

The experts also urged the government to supply safety kits which contains gloves, mask, hand wash/sanitizer bottles to all municipal workers and ragpickers, since they manually handle household waste regularly.

Common citizens are advised to dispose their garbage in three categories – biomedical waste (tissues, masks, gloves, sanitizer bottles), recyclables (metal cans, all size PET/HDPE plastic bottles and other heavy plastic objects, cardboards) and compostable (food and other organic waste).

Padma Shri awardee and retired vice chancellor of Institute of Chemical Technology(ICT) Prof. GD Yadav said, “The leading scientists and organizations are anticipating that close to 60% of population would be infected hence the widespread panic is natural, but we can adopt some safety measures to curtail the spread. In addition to follow the guidelines issued by leading health bodies, we must also dispose our gloves, masks, sanitizer bottles, tissue papers responsibly so these items are collected and treated/recycled to contain the infection. While, the recycling ecosystem doesn't exist for gloves/masks but small sanitizer bottles which is PET plastic, is one of the highest recycled plastic globally and must be disposed properly to ensure recycling. Infection can come from anywhere, reusable items such as cups, glasses should be avoided at restaurants/public places and single use plastics which are highly recycled in India should be preferred for the time being.”

Dr V Ramasubramanian, infectious diseases expert, Apollo Hospitals said, “There should be no handling of garbage with bare hands by municipal workers. General public should also ensure that they segregate waste at source, reducing the need for municipal workers to touch and separate waste manually, which would expose them to infections. Scientifically, gloves/masks should be incinerated post usages but since it can't be practiced at every household hence there should be a different garbage bag to dispose house-hold biomedical waste such as used tissues, gloves etc. especially during the current outbreak. Waste segregation at source should also be practiced generally to ensure that our waste is not ending up in landfills/oceans, in place of recycling facilities and composters.”

Prof. Arun Sawant, former vice chancellor, Mumbai University and Rajasthan University and director, India, Waste to Energy Research and Technology Council, President, Society for Clean environment

(SOCLEEN), “The scientific/medical information about COVID-19 must be mass-circulated to make informed decisions to contain the outbreak. Plastics are truly the scientific marvels, which have increased the efficiency and hygiene of medicine/medical equipment's from the surgery suite to the doctor’s office. Imagine if we were still dependent on metal gas masks, woolen gloves and glass bottles to carry our sanitizers. Plastics like PET, HDPE have made the gigantic task of providing essential supplies during natural catastrophes and containing disease outbreaks easier, since it is light weight, non-breakable, inexpensive, easy to carry and provides high levels of safety. The recycling process is really important for the environment, and we shouldn’t suddenly forsake that because of all the fear around this particular issue.”

Dr. Deepak Saxena, medical expert on Public Health and Professor, Indian Institute of Public Health said, “The society’s perception and practice of indiscriminate disposal of various items can be a potential source of infection of COVID to municipal workers. The communities need to dispose their used napkins, tissues, empty sanitizer bottles in a separate bag, to ensure the safety of municipal workers and ragpickers. It will also ensure that the cycle of garbage collection and plastic recycling don’t get affected. The government should also provide safety kits to municipal workers urgently and educate them on how to handle household waste during the outbreak, to help in halting the chain of transmission.”

The Indian government is providing masks, sanitizer/handwash bottles and plastic water bottles to the people who have been quarantined in various parts of our country. Experts from across the globe are demanding to provide safety equipment to local workers, allow easily disposable but highly recycled items such as plastic bottles for drinking water and temporary ban reusable items at municipal or government offices to contain the COVID19 outbreak.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that some 89 million medical masks, 76 million examination gloves and 1.6 million goggles will be needed for the COVID-19 response every month while the pandemic lasts.

<http://www.pharmabiz.com/NewsDetails.aspx?aid=121962&sid=2>