

CAPT AMARINDER LED PUNJAB CABINET REVIEWS COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS, GOVT DOCTORS & PARAMEDICAL STAFF GIVEN EXTENSION TILL SEPT 30

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- CM ASKS MINISTERS TO OVERSEE SITUATION & HOLD MEETINGS WITH LOCAL ADMIN IN RESPECTIVE DISTRICTS
- RESOLUTION APPEALS TO PEOPLE TO AVOID LARGE GATHERINGS & CROWDED PLACES, TO LIMIT WEDDINGS TO 50 PERSONS
- SANITISERS TO BE MADE AVAILABLE IN ALL STATE-RUN & PVT BUSES, RELIGIOUS & DERA URGED HEADS TO MINIMISE GATHERINGS,

Chandigarh, March 16: The Captain Amarinder Singh led Punjab Government on Monday issued a strong appeal to the people not to panic in view of the Coronavirus scare but to take all the necessary precautions, while avoiding crowded places and mass gatherings.

The Council of Ministers, led by the Chief Minister, took stock of the situation and the state's preparedness to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak, and also reviewed the reports of the 7-member Group of Ministers (GoM) constituted earlier by Captain Amarinder under the Chairmanship of Local Bodies Minister Brahm Mohindra to oversee the preventive measures undertaken to combat the threat. The GoM comprises Om Parkash Soni, Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa, Razia Sultana, Balbir Singh Sidhu, Vijay Inder Singla and Bharat Bhushan Ashu.

In a resolution passed at the meeting, the Cabinet gave ex-post facto approval to the Chief Minister's decision on extending the services of the doctors and paramedical staff working with the Government of Punjab in Health & Family Welfare Department till 30th September, 2020.

Though Punjab has so far reportedly only one confirmed case, no effort is being spared by the state government to ensure stringent measures against the spread of the disease, which has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO). While appreciating the efforts of all Departments of the Government of Punjab, the Cabinet appealed to the people to be fully prepared and take all precautions as advised by the Health & Family Welfare Department from time to time.

The Cabinet, in its resolution, further appealed to the people to avoid going to crowded places and mass gatherings, to maintain hand and respiratory hygiene, and to ensure

cleanliness of their surroundings. People are also advised to wash their hands frequently with soap & water or hand-sanitizer and they should avoid touching their face, said an official spokesperson after the cabinet meeting.

Further, the people have been advised to avoid non-essential travel, said the resolution. It stated that people who are having cough, sneezing and fever should immediately contact 104-Medical Helpline of the Health & Family Welfare Department or the Control Rooms of their respective district.

Following discussions at the meeting, the cabinet also appealed to people to either defer wedding functions or ensure that not more than 50 persons are present. It also appealed to religious and dera heads to limit the gatherings and educate their followers about the Coronavirus dangers.

During the Cabinet meeting, the Chief Minister asked all the ministers to closely monitor the situation and ensure the implementation of the curbs in their respective districts, in close coordination with the administrative and civic officials. He urged them to hold regular meetings with the local administration to maintain visibility in their districts and boost the confidence of the people.

Captain Amarinder directed the Health Department to ensure that ventilators are available in all district hospitals to deal with the exigency. He further ordered private and state run buses to carry hand sanitisers for the use of passengers to ensure hygiene in the vehicles and secure the travelers.

It may be noted that all the Government and private schools have already been closed till March 31 in the state. However, medical colleges (senior year students) have been kept open as a support system. The cabinet decided that MBBS students who were not employed should be contacted and asked by the department to stand by on voluntary basis.

Detailed instructions have also been issued for closure of all cinema halls, gyms and swimming pools in the state from the midnight of March 14 till further orders. All large public gatherings including sports, conferences, cultural events, fairs and exhibitions, wedding functions, are also prohibited till further orders. The cabinet has, however, left the decision on closure of malls and marriage palaces to the GoM, said the spokesperson.

The meeting was informed that the DCs were geared up to launch house-to-house awareness campaign involving all health workers, who are being trained for the purpose, from March 19 to 26. Training of all the staff of all the departments in districts will be completed by March 18, 2020, Principal Secretary Health and Family Welfare, Anurag Aggarwal, apprised the cabinet through a detailed presentation. Teams of two to three officials headed by group A and B officials will also be formed by March 18, 2020. These teams will be assigned villages/areas/locality/wards/colonies keeping in view the population, which will contact each and every household in their assigned

areas to educate and inform every individual about the precautions and to inform about any person with symptoms. This will be completed by March 26, 2020.

Aggarwal said the single confirmed COVID-19 patient, with travel history of Italy, had been admitted in GMC Amritsar and was now stable. His wife and son had tested negative but were under observation.

As per the presentation, as many as 91689 passengers have been screened at the International Airports at Amritsar and Mohali, as well as the international check posts at Wagah Border and Kartarpur corridor till date. Out of 8 symptomatic passengers found during screening at these sites, one was positive and all others were tested negative at GMC Amritsar.

The cabinet was further informed that 100 samples had been sent for testing till date, of which only one was positive and 95 negative for COVID-19, while the results of four samples were still awaited.

Medical teams with security personnel had been deputed at both the airports for the screening of the passengers. Mandatory screening of all passengers was being done and self declaration form was being taken from each passenger to ascertain the travel history of any foreign country from March 13 onwards.

Aggarwal disclosed that 1077 beds for isolation of patients had been identified in 22 District Hospitals and 3 Govt Medical Colleges of the state. Apart from these, 24 ventilators were available in three Government Medical Colleges and two District Hospital for management of serious cases. Another 376 isolation beds and 290 ventilators had also been identified in private hospitals.

Adequate stock of PPEs (Personal Protective Equipment), N95 Masks, Triple Layer masks and gloves were available with the Health and Family Welfare Department for COVID-19. Further, procurement of more PPE, N95 Masks and Triple layer masks was under process.

To maintain strict vigil over the situation 24X7, control rooms had been established at State and District level, and Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) had also been prepared and trained for surveillance and containment, both at the state and district levels. The services of all Rural Medical Officers had been put at the disposal of Civil Surgeons of the districts and all the district teams had been trained for sample collection, transportation of suspected cases as per protocol of ICMR, the meeting was informed. Further, Virology labs at Government Medical College Amritsar and Patiala were now testing samples of COVID-19. Health teams in all districts were contacting the passengers coming to Punjab from different countries after being screened at Delhi or other airports. Passengers found asymptomatic are nevertheless being under surveillance as a precautionary measure.

Elaborating the Department's Containment Plan, Aggarwal said the SOPs had been shared with all the DCs and mock drills had been conducted by all the districts to check

preparedness for containment of COVID-19. Similarly, district, block and village level control rooms had been established. State and District Disaster Management Committees were reviewing the situation daily and inter-sectoral coordination is maintained for COVID-19 preparedness. Advisories had been issued to all the Departments and Districts for awareness of general public and staff.

The Principal Secretary also informed the Cabinet that Punjab was the first state to notify COVID-19 under Epidemic Disease Act, 1897. Under these regulations, Deputy Commissioners are authorised to take any action for containment and management of cases of COVID-19.