



Tea Board India

(Under Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Dept. of Commerce, Govt. of India)

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Standard Operating Procedure guidelines for Tea Sector during COVID-19 Pandemic

In view of outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the country, the Government of India has declared nationwide lockdown since 24th March, 2020 to contain the spread of novel corona virus in the country. The Health authorities have advised that in order to control the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to take effective measures at community level for the management of disease, its containment, and to prevent its spread across the country. The COVID-19 is very contagious and capable of asymptomatic spread, so it is even more important to mobilize all the concerned stakeholders and get every citizen involved in the process. The successful implementation of prevention and control measures is vital for containment and handling of this new pandemic. With the onset of nationwide lockdown, various agricultural sectors including sectors which manufacture essential items and other industries requested the Government to allow them to continue production, with certain restrictions in place so as to maintain the cash flow in the system and to avoid disruption of the supply chain which is essential for sustenance of citizens. This will also allow the farmers and the workers to earn their livelihood.

On similar line, Tea Industry which is highly labour intensive and also being part of the Agricultural activity had represented to the Government to allow manufacturing of tea during the lockdown period as tea is a labour intensive industry. Further, the industry also includes small farmers who sell their produce to manufacturing units.

In view of the above, to mitigate the hardship faced by the industry, citizens and also due to several other economic reasons, the Ministry of Home Affairs vide order no.40-3/2020-DM-I(A) dated 03-04-2020 has allowed the tea industry to operate with maximum 50% of workers. Consequent to this, various tea producing states have allowed operations in tea gardens with 25% to 50% of workers on a shift basis.

Restarting the Tea Industry in a staggered manner will help resumption of the production and export of tea so that approximately 1250 M.kgs of production and 210 M.kgs of exports can be achieved during 2020-21, it would further ensure continuous employment and better livelihood of the stakeholders, generation of sufficient revenue towards payment of wages, statutory dues, rations etc., and also for investment in development activities.

There is a need for consistency in the application and implementation of various preventive measures across the country while ensuring maintenance of essential services, economic activities and supplies. So it is imperative on the part of every employer to take care of overall health of the workers while restarting the operations of their plantations/factories in a staggered manner. Again the key for better management of this outbreak is to make everyone responsible, and make every plantation/production unit accountable across the country.

Due to the lockdown, there is a tremendous strain on the healthcare workers, Law enforcement agencies, sanitary workers and other supporting staff who are working tirelessly round the clock to ensure the well-being of the citizens. It is the foremost duty and responsibility of every stakeholder in this sector to ensure the safety and well-being of all those who are involved in performing their duties. In order to protect them from the highly contagious COVID-19, a well-planned and focused approach in addition to clear role assignment for individuals and organizations for specific tasks is a pre-requisite to effectively deal with this difficult situation.

Therefore, to ensure safe working conditions and to adopt the Health Ministry's guideline with regard to containment and spread of COVID-19, the following standard operating procedures are issued for the tea sector. These guidelines are only indicative and other additional measures if any, issued by the respective State Government/District Administration for the effective containment of COVID-19 shall have to be followed in letter and spirit.

Plantations (Big Growers & Small Tea Growers)

- a) All Estates (BG & SG) have to adhere to the guidelines issued from time to time regarding the preventive measures for COVID-19 outbreak by the Central/ the State Government.
- b) The garden management should ensure the screening of health parameters of their workers and staff deployed in the field operations, and provide basic protective gear such as hand gloves, notified face masks, protective uniforms, sanitizers, water facility (in fields, crèches) for regular washing of with soaps etc. Any staff or worker engaged in the field must be physically fit to take up the work and in case of noticing any COVID-19 symptom among the workers; the same shall be reported to the local health authorities immediately. The screening shall be done before the commencement (IN) of work and after the completion of work (OUT) and records regarding this activity shall be maintained and shared with the local health administration as and when requested by them.
- c) Only minimum number of workers have to be deployed (as prescribed by the State Government/ District administration from time to time) in production activity and due consent from each worker/staff shall have to be obtained. Details of workers, such as name, age, medical history of their family members have to be maintained in a separate register.
- d) Proper social distancing norms have to be adopted during the field operations and other duty hours within the estate and factory premises as directed by the respective State health department/ District Administration.
- e) Depending upon the pruning cycle, the un-pruned sections may be skiffed so that the overgrown tea leaves are discarded to get the new shoots.
- f) The migrant workers must be properly screened before they are deployed for the field operations. Their details such as travel history, previous nature of work, general health conditions etc., shall also be recorded, maintained and shared with the respective District administration.

- g) The estate hospital and clinics shall be made operational with adequate number of Doctors, health workers and emergency health care equipments. Isolation/Quarantine wards also have to be earmarked within that hospital in consultation with the District Administration.
- h) Minimum handling of green leaves and proper hygiene shall be ensured while plucking and handling of green tea leaves
- i) All the technical advisories issued by the TRA in the case of North India and UPASI in the case of South India should be followed.
- j) The agricultural equipments used in the garden operations shall be properly sanitized before and after use.
- k) The management should furnish the list of vehicles and workers with necessary information such as registration number, name and designation of worker, etc., to obtain vehicle passes and exemption permits from the respective District Administration.
- l) Adequate numbers of supervisors have to be engaged by the management for monitoring the field activity and welfare of workers.
- m) The garden management shall organize weekly health camps within the garden and/or jointly with the respective District administration to screen the workers on a regular basis.
- n) The management may organize health awareness camps in the gardens to disseminate various regulations issued by the State Government/the Central Government regarding prevention of COVID-19 outbreak among the workers.
- o) A duty roster of the workers engaged in various works within the estate and the factory shall be prepared by the management and the same shall be provided to the worker's union and to the respective District administration.
- p) Records should be maintained for all field operations, including adherence to the PPC code, for ensuring the quality of the raw materials.
- q) The primary contacts or family members of a person who is undergoing treatment for COVID- 19 shall not be engaged for any field operation under any circumstances.
- r) All other statutory norms have to be followed as envisaged under Plantation Labour Act.
- s) No crowding shall be allowed under any circumstances inside the Garden/Estate/Factory.
- t) Monitoring may be done by using DRONE camera to keep a vigil on social distancing norms followed by the workers during various field activities and the said details may be shared with the respective District Administration if necessary.

Processing/Manufacturing/warehousing/Packing & Transportation to/from Tea Unit:

- i. All the manufacturing units/packaging units/transportation agencies have to follow the guidelines regarding COVID-19 outbreak issued by the Central/ the State Government/the District administration from time to time.
- ii. The entire factory premises/ machineries/equipments must be sanitized properly before the commencement of manufacturing process.
- iii. The management should ensure the screening of health parameters of their workers and staff deployed in the field operations, and provide basic protective gear such as hand gloves, notified face masks, protective uniforms, sanitizers, water facility (in fields, crèches) for regular washing of hands with soaps etc. Any staff or worker engaged in the field must be physically fit to take up the work and in the event of noticing any COVID-19 symptoms among the workers; the same shall be reported to the District administration immediately. The screening shall be done before commencement (IN) of the work and after completion of the work (OUT) and all such records shall be maintained and shared with the respective District administration as and when requested.
- iv. The migrant workers must be properly screened before they are deployed for the field operations. Their details such as travel history, previous nature of work, general health conditions etc., shall also be recorded and shared with the respective District administration.
- v. Proper social distancing norms should be followed during the operation and other duty hours within the factory premises/processing areas/ warehouses as directed by the respective State health department/ District Administration.
- vi. No crowding shall be allowed under any circumstances inside the Factories/Ware houses/ Packing units/ any other processing areas.
- vii. The management shall organize health awareness camps to disseminate various regulations issued by the State Government/ the Central Government regarding prevention of outbreak of COVID-19 among the workers.
- viii. All the portable machineries shall be properly sanitized before and after use.
- ix. Proper care shall be taken while sanitizing the machineries. An adequate time **gap** shall be maintained between the sanitizing process and the commencement of actual processing to ensure there is no harmful effect on the finished goods (made tea), as tea is hygroscopic in nature.
- x. All chemicals and sanitizers shall be kept away from the finished products.
- xi. Minimum handling of the finished goods is to be ensured by the factory managers/workers. The finished products shall be packed properly for ensuring zero contamination.
- xii. Concerned factories have to make arrangements for transportation of green tea leaves by strictly conforming to the prescribed COVID -19 regulations and norms.

- xiii. The management should furnish the list of vehicles and workers with necessary information such as registration number, name and designation of worker, etc., to obtain vehicle passes and exemption permits from the respective District Administration.
- xiv. The management shall inform in writing to the nearest Tea Board field office regarding the date of commencement of the operation of their factory/warehouse/packaging unit.
- xv. Sufficient time gap shall be maintained between each shift and manufacturing cycle and the machineries have to be washed and sanitized properly.

The above measures have been enumerated keeping in view the emergent situation. These measures along with very close monitoring by the respective management will help combating this COVID-19 outbreak effectively.
