

**Press Information Bureau
Government of India**

MHA clarifies on ground level issues being faced by States in ensuring smooth flow of supply chain of Essential Items during National Lockdown to fight COVID-19

States advised to inform District authorities and field agencies regarding the Clarifications so as to avoid any ambiguity at the ground level

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Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had issued consolidated guidelines on the lockdown measures to be taken by Ministries/ Departments of Government of India, State/Union Territory Governments and State/ Union Territory Authorities for containment of COVID-19 epidemic in the country, on 24.03.2020 and further modified on 25.03.2020, 26.03.2020 and 02.04.2020.

At the ground level different interpretations are being made on the items given exceptions, which hinder smooth flow of supply chain of these essential items. Suggestions have also been received from some quarters in regard to these Guidelines. In view of these developments, Union Home Secretary, Shri Ajay Kumar Bhalla has written to all State Chief Secretaries clarifying on ground level issues being faced by States in ensuring smooth flow of supply chain of essential items during national lockdown to fight COVID-19. The communication deals in detail with different categories of essential items exempt from the lockdown restrictions.

Taking the case of **“laboratories”**, the communication clarifies that they have been exempted from lockdown restrictions. This includes the testing laboratories in the private sector for Covid-19 samples. These samples are collected through various collection centres, and thereafter transported to the aforesaid laboratories. It is reiterated that the opening up of temporary collection centres, movement of lab technicians and transportation of samples from the collection centres to the laboratories is to be allowed and exempted from any lockdown restrictions on movement.

Coming to daily essentials, the communication states that exceptions to **sale (including through e-Commerce), production, warehousing and transport of essential goods** such as food, groceries, fruits and vegetables, dairy and milk products, meat and fish, animal fodder, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, agriculture produce, drugs, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, their raw material and intermediaries have been specifically mentioned in the aforesaid guidelines. In a communication on 29th March, 2020, it was clarified that **grocery would include hygiene products** such as hand washes, soaps, disinfectants, body wash, shampoos, surface cleaners, detergents and tissue papers, toothpaste / oral care, sanitary pads and diapers, charger and battery cells etc.

In order to further streamline supplies of essential goods, following clarifications are issued:-

- i) Queries have been received as to **what constitutes food and grocery**. Since it is neither feasible nor desirable to mention each item of food and grocery in the guidelines, the State/UT Governments have been advised to interpret these terms to mean **all items of food and grocery that are usually consumed by people on day to day basis**.
- ii) **Production, warehousing and transport of essential goods** are included under exceptions in the guidelines and the district authorities are issuing individual passes to businesses covered in the exempted category. Difficulties in getting passes are, however, being faced by businesses having nation-wide supply chains of essential goods. In order to address this concern, the State/UT Governments have been advised to issue authorization letters to companies/ organizations having nation-wide supply chains of essential goods, allowing them to issue regional passes for easy movement of critical staff and workers in order to maintain their national supply chains. It has been further advised to keep the numbers of such authorizations bare minimum.
- iii) While operations of Railways, Airports and Seaports for **cargo movement, relief and evacuation** is allowed under the guidelines, difficulties are being faced in obtaining passes from district authorities in some cases. In order to address this and to accelerate unloading and mobility of goods across the country, it has been clarified that the designated authorities under Railways, Ports and Airports be allowed to issue passes for a critical mass of staff and contractual labour that are essential for such operations.
- iv) **Inter-state and intra-state movement of all trucks and other goods / carrier vehicles**, with one driver and one additional person, is allowed as long as the driver is carrying a valid driver's license. If the truck/ vehicle is travelling empty, invoice, way-bill etc. for delivery or pick up of goods may additionally be carried by the drivers. Movement of driver and one person from their place of residence to truck should also be facilitated by local authorities.
- v) All movement of persons with the passes shall be subject to strict adherence to **norms for hygiene and social distancing** as is required in the context of COVID19.

The communication emphasizes that District authorities and field agencies may be informed on the above accordingly, so as to avoid any ambiguity at the ground level.

VG/SNC/VM