

1 April 2020

To: Dr. K.S Sachdeva, DDG, Central TB Division, MoHFW, GoI

CC:

Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Ho'ble Cabinet Minister, MoHFW, GoI

Sh. Sanjeeva Kumar, Special Secretary, MoHFW, GoI

Sh. Vikas Sheel, Joint Secretary, MoHFW, GoI

Sub: TB and COVID 19 - The New Threat to Our Communities and Need For Action NOW

Respected Sir,

Firstly, we TB survivors, representatives of the TB affected communities and civil society members laud your efforts at stemming the tide of the new threat to our country, i.e. COVID 19. We are sure that you and your team are putting up a strong front in this fight and we stand by you.

The COVID 19 pandemic raises concerns among the affected communities, as a lot of us have suffered considerable lung damage and we worry about our bodies being able to muster a strong defence to this virus, we know affects the lungs and the respiratory track.

We are concerned that we might get infected with the Novel Corona Virus when we approach crowded DOTS centres for our medications. Hence we now look to you to kindly issue an advisory to the state and districts TB cells to help us mitigate this challenge.

Sir, a lot of us also have family members who have been cured of TB but are immuno-compromised, we need to consider that as a probable accelerator for the transmission chain. The very population that we have kept alive by ensuring successful TB treatments might again be in deep jeopardy. Hence, it is imperative that we have your support and guidance in these trying times.

Therefore we request you to act now. We kindly seek you to ensure strict implementation of the guidelines issued by you on 25.03.2020 with close monitoring. In addition to the guidance laid out in the advisory we are also request you to:

Ensure guidance that family members and next of kin can collect drugs on behalf of TB patients so that they might be spared from visiting crowded health centres

Ensure TB patients can access TB drugs from their closest DOTS centre irrespective of their registration site to mitigate challenges arising due to reverse migration underway right now

Consider programmatically looking at a volunteer based home-delivery of drugs for TB patients to mitigate challenges of arising due to public transport being suspended

Give specific guidance on what should be done at the DOTS Centres, how the dispensation of TB treatment could be improved

Guidance on what should the ART centres attached to the DOTS centres do

Guidance on quarantine requirements of COVID infected TB patients, TB survivors and key populations

Treatment guidance for TB patients diagnosed with COVID so that the person is treated with dignity and not discriminated. Guidance on regimen that should be used since they are already in treatment for TB

Explore possibility of providing ATT for at least 2-3 months

Ensure enough CBNAAT Cartridges so testing is unhindered as there could be many symptomatic referrals during this pandemic

For further details and you may send response to Dr.Raghavan Gopakumar- 9811557590, email: dr.r.gopakumar@gmail.com

We kindly request you to act now. This can avert a crisis and save lives.

Sincerely Yours,

Touched by TB- National Coalition of TB Affected, India

TB Mukta Vahini, Bihar

Tej TB

Individuals:

Aarti Kumar, Advocate, Delhi

Blessina Kumar, TbTB, GCTA

Chinmay, TbTB and GNP+

Eldred Tellis, Sankalp Rehabilitation Trust, Mumbai

Elizabeth Selhore, Sahara Allhad, Pune

Faiz Anwar, Tej TB

Ganesh Acharya, TB/ HIV Activist, TbTB Mumbai

Ketho Angami, ARK Foundation, Nagaland

Khargeswar, TB Champion Jharkhand, TbTB

Loon Gangte ,DNP+

Md. Hashmat Rabbani, Gramin Samaj Kalyan Vikas Manch, Jharkhand

Meera Yadav, XDR Survivor and TB Champion

Mona Balani, NCPI+

Prabha Mahesh, TbTB

Prashant, Sikkim, TbTB

Priyanka Aiyer, GCTA

Raghavan Gopa Kuma, TbTB

Rama Pandian, TbTB

Santosh Kumari, Kolkata Rishta, TbTB

Sridhar Pandey, CCM member, Gautam Budha Jagriti Society, Gorakhpur , Uttar Pradesh