ICC Advisory on Occupational Health for COVID-19

As India fights COVID-19 and is under lockdown for 3 weeks, thousands of the working class are confined to their homes and are having to face an unprecedented situation across sectors. Taking necessary precautions can save the country from imminent danger, and with necessary social restrictions, we are gradually going to bounce back and return to normalcy.

However, as we deal with the lockdown, there are few aspects that need to be dealt with when it comes to occupational health:

1) There are thousands in the unorganized sector who might get deeply affected during this period. Some of them might rendered jobless while many may get distressed due to financial consequences due to lack of stable income during this period. A special project/program could be undertaken by the local administration/community/industry so that necessary support is extended to this sector and they can also bounce back when the time is right.

2) Work leads to wellness. It is important to stay healthy even when not working. In order to stay healthy, it is important to stay active and focused. Practicing yoga, meditation, exercising indoors are some ways in which one can stay fit. However, another important aspect is to also take care of mental health. Sudden withdrawal from work and confinement can lead to quite a few mental health issues amongst the active workforce. It is therefore important to stay connected with the co-workers and indulge in activities that can keep one engaged and mentally fit while still at home.

3) Returning to work does not mean it will be work as usual at least for the foreseeable future. It is therefore important to keep practicing the self hygiene practices that one has learnt during this trying time. The government and industry could get together to ensure:

   a) Medical checkup of all employees
   b) Sanitization practices to continue without any end date
   c) Workplaces should have a policy in place that outlines their requirements when people may be sick or absent to care for others. This policy should indicate how to notify the workplace, and if there is a requirement for a doctor's note and when.
   d) Workplaces can help by having an infection control plan which may include details such as:

      - Providing clean hand washing facilities.
      - Offering alcohol-based hand sanitizers when regular facilities are not available (or to people on the road).
      - Cleaning objects that are touched frequently, such as doorknobs, handles, railings, kettles, etc. more often with regular disinfectants or soap and water.
- Providing boxes of tissues and encourage their use.
- Reminding staff to not share cups, glasses, dishes and cutlery. Be sure dishes are washed in soap and water after use.
- Removing magazines and papers from waiting areas or common rooms (such as tea rooms and kitchens).
- Making sure ventilation systems are working properly.
- Cleaning a person's workstation or other areas where they have been if a person has been suspected or identified with an infection.
- Using social distancing techniques, such as using telephone, video conferencing, or the internet to conduct as much business as possible (including within the same building), allow employees to work from home, or to work flexible hours to avoid peak public transportation times or crowding the workplace.

4) While organizing conferences or meetings:
   a) Decrease the number of participants attending such meetings. Only the most relevant people should be invited. Promote tele/video conference over face to face meeting.
   b) Suitable masks and hand sanitizers may be made available to all participants in face to face meetings.
   c) Educate participants to refrain from attending such meetings in case they are experiencing any flu like symptoms or feeling unwell.
   d) Isolation room should be made available in case any participant is feeling unwell and needs to be safely isolated.
   e) Prepare a plan of action to be followed if any participant attending the meeting tests positive for COVID-19.