

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, & Ministry of Textiles

Joint Press Brief on Supply of Body Coveralls (Personal Protective Equipment), N-95 Masks, and 2-ply/3-ply Surgical Masks for healthcare professionals to combat COVID-19 cases.

It is unfortunate that certain sections of the media are spreading misinformation on the efforts of the Government in augmenting the supplies of Body Coveralls, N-95 Masks, and 2-ply/3-ply Surgical Masks required for healthcare professionals dealing COVID-19 cases. Since Body Coveralls (PPE) is a specialized protective suit meant for high level of protection to the health professionals, it has stringent technical requirements as prescribed by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

Over the last 45 days, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Ministry of Textiles are attempting to locate adequate number of sources who can produce and supply the requirement of Body Coveralls for the government. During the last week of January 2020, the technical standard for the Coveralls was prescribed as per WHO class-3 exposure pressure in accordance with ISO 16003 or its equivalent. Such materials are manufactured by a few international companies, who expressed their inability to supply on account of a complete glut in stocks and ban of exports by the source countries. Only a limited quantity was offered and procured by the procurement organization of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. Starting from 30th January, wide outreach has been attempted through various meetings and interactions with the Chambers of Commerce various Textiles Associations, medical textiles manufacturers and suppliers; in inviting a higher participation of the such manufacturers having adequate capacity to partner with the government and offer their proto-types for testing. M/s HLL Lifecare Limited is the designated single-window procurement agency for the hospitals and healthcare organisations under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India. Five indigenous manufacturers came forward and offered fabric proto-types for testing at the accredited laboratory of South India Textiles research association (SITRA) at Coimbatore. All these attempts were directed at indigenous development of

manufacturing sources as international supplies could not be possible. The testing was done at SITRA between 2nd February to 25th February 2020, and the results of the fabric samples were referred to the technical experts to consider and decide on the technical requirements for COVID-19, considering the information on nature and characteristics of SARS-COVID-2 virus known by to the medical experts.

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare finalised the technical requirement on 2nd March 2020, based on the indigenous availability of materials and the technical requirement for a high level of protection of the healthcare professionals who would deal with the COVID-19 cases, in consultation with medical experts in the field. The specification was published on the official website of HLL Lifecare Ltd on 5th March 2020, inviting manufacturers having adequate capability to participate in the procurement process. So far, proto type garments of six Indian manufacturers have passed the prescribed tests conducted at SITRA, and two more manufacturers are forthcoming as on date. In addition, more and more manufacturers have been invited to offer their proto type samples, and come forward to meet the requirement of the government. It is for information of all that the technical specification, prices, and quantity required are published on the official website of HLL Lifecare Limited (www.lifecarehll.com) and every potential manufacturer in the country is invited to participate in the endeavour of the government. The supply of Body Coveralls from indigenous manufacturers according the MoH&FW's revised technical requirement dated 2nd March 2020, has already commenced.

Further, in order to maintain a strong reserve of these essential medical products; Government has issued orders banning of exports on all personal protective equipment including Body Coveralls, N-95 Masks, 2-ply/3-ply Surgical Masks on 31st January 2020. On request from the industry, and on the assurance that adequate supply of 2-ply/3-ply Surgical Masks at reasonable prices would be ensured, Government lifted the ban on exports of Surgical Masks on 8th February. However, the ban on exports was re-imposed on 19th March 2020, on all 2-ply/3-ply Surgical Masks and the raw materials required for manufacture of such products. The export ban on Body Coveralls and N-95

Masks has since been in force since 31st January 2020, a fact in contravention to the misleading information published in the media.

It is assured that Ministry of Health & family Welfare, Department of Pharmaceuticals, and Ministry of Textiles are continuously working with various industry bodies, stakeholders and manufacturers on 24x7 basis, to streamline the supply chain, remove bottlenecks and maintain a steady supply of all materials required for the healthcare professionals.