

GITAM COVID-19 Policy

The coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented health crisis cascading into a socio-economic crisis. Embedded in the coronavirus statistics is a great deal of suffering. Every country, society and organization needs to prepare, respond and recuperate. We are hard at work and believe that strong and precise measures are key to allowing the University to be reopened, while ensuring that faculty, staff and students continue to stay safe. As our president stated “...*the only way to overcome this pandemic is to work together and take a unified stand.*”

GITAM constituted the COVID-19 Committee to frame guidelines and implementation of the policy. The terms of reference for the Committee are to:

- ✓ Draft guidelines to protect the health and safety of all stakeholders (Students, Teaching Staff, Non-Teaching Staff, Invitees, Parents, Visitors and others);
- ✓ Draft guidelines to provide safe workspaces in Administrative Buildings, Institutional Buildings, Laboratories, and safe living spaces in residential accommodation for students and staff along with hygienic dining spaces, recreation rooms, play grounds, washrooms and other frequently used places including parking lots and garages;
- ✓ Arrange for dissemination of information pertaining to the proposed safety measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19 to all stakeholders through various media from time to time;
- ✓ Create awareness among and train all concerned in proper implementation of measures along designated timelines;
- ✓ Update and communicate guidelines issued by statutory authorities from time to time through GITAM website;
- ✓ Guide the new recruits reporting to duty in adherence to guidelines and in compliance with statutory requirements;
- ✓ Inform all new student entrants reporting to class work about the measures taken and protocols to be followed;
- ✓ Establish a rapid response team in each Institute to implement standard operating procedures in case of exigencies;
- ✓ Monitor and review guidelines and implementation on the basis of systemic feedback.

The COVID-19 policy of GITAM is a dynamic document, which will continue to evolve in response to emerging needs. The policy document is evidence based and is supported by data from various functions of the University.

Gating Criteria

Gating criteria are data-driven conditions each region or state should satisfy before proceeding to a phased opening as advised by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The locations where the three campuses are situated and also the areas from where the students are expected to arrive on campuses will be tracked as

per the prescribed parameters. Gating and Phasing Committee will track this data in real time, provide weekly updates and modify gating criteria accordingly. The tracking data of each region/districts' progress towards its reduction in symptoms and cases, health system readiness and increased test capacity will be procured on a daily basis from health dashboards of the three states where GITAM campuses are located. Based on the prevalence of the infection rates, and other parameters the Gating Committee will issue colour coding to the specified districts as follows:



The metric used here is the 14-day trend of COVID+. Dark Red indicates an increase (>25% change) during the 14-day period. Red indicates an increase (5%-25%) during the 14-day period. Yellow indicates flattening (<5%) during the 14-day period. Green indicates a decreasing trend (>5%) during the 14-day period. Another metric calculates surfacing of positive cases from testing (positive cases/total tests). This metric uses the rolling average of the past 7 days. Dark Red indicates more than 10%; Red indicates a 7-10% increase; Yellow indicates 2-7% of increase and Green indicates less than 2% increase. An aggregate score will be prepared on the basis of these two criteria.

Alternatively, three other parameters - new total positivity rate, total number of tests, total number of deaths, being considered by district authorities can be taken into consideration. Other best practices include gating when the case positivity rate becomes less than one percent, which is calculated on the basis of number of new cases/number of deaths during a defined period of time. It is proposed to initiate gating on a pilot basis and then scale it up to be individually determined for the campuses.

As and when, students re-enter the campuses (Visakhapatnam, Hyderabad, Bengaluru) to join their respective courses, the psychiatry department at GIMSR, Visakhapatnam, in coordination with Applied Psychology department at GITAM School of Gandhian Studies, would conduct group sessions (online through Zoom/Coursera lasting for 60-90 minutes approximately), aimed at orienting the student to the new campus environment during COVID-19. The group sessions will be meant to assist the students learn and practice positive lifestyle approaches to managing stress, and balance study requirements alongside restrictions brought on by the pandemic. The group sessions will also provide students with a brief screening questionnaire to help identify stress and mental health issues, so that a pathway to seek appropriate help can be identified.

Students and staff are to download Arogya Setu App before they start their travel to campus. Arogya Setu is to be displayed at the gate. 'Red' status on Arogya Setu has to be informed to the Registrar.

All students arriving on campus are mandated to submit a self-declaration form. Hostel students arriving in Phase 1 will be quarantined with close monitoring. Zoning of the campuses with high density is done with barricading and stationing of guards to enable adherence to quarantine requirements. The quarantined students are to key in their vitals into the online forms on a daily basis for closer monitoring. For COVID-19 positive individuals, packaged meals are to be delivered to their rooms. Other individuals will be provided meals at the dining facilities in compliance with social distancing norms. Food from outside is not to be allowed. Students who are not willing to adhere to these new norms will be advised not to report to the hostel.

Need based individual counseling sessions (through video-consultation, lasting for about 30 minutes approximately) will be provided for those identified to have any specific health issues on the screening questionnaire, or for any of the students or faculty who seek counseling.

Testing Procedures for Re-Entry

Students and faculty returning for residential accommodation should get a COVID-19 negative certificate from an ICMR authorized laboratory that is valid for 48 hours. Faculty and staff according to roster will be allowed and must strictly adhere to the SOPs. Day scholars according to a schedule will be welcomed once each of the campus remains in a green zone for four weeks. Follow-up testing is recommended for anyone who is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, has been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, or has traveled to an area with high levels of SARS-CoV-2 community spread. Follow-up testing requirements and results also need to be mandatorily communicated. Re-entry upon testing positive for staff and students would be allowed upon completion of 28 days after testing positive and on production of a fitness certificate. GIMSR will medically examine COVID-19 positive individuals after 28 days and provide the fitness certificate. Checklists prepared by the Department of Community Medicine will be provided to the coordinators to assist in identification of symptomatic individuals. If an individual tests positive, appropriate action will be extended with reference to hospitalization support, health monitoring, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine along with heightened disinfection of workspaces.

Student Health Services Committee (SHSC) and Employee Health Services Committee (EHSC) consisting of hostel coordinators/wardens, faculty members from community medicine and psychiatry, diagnostic lab coordinators and clinicians will play a pivotal role in COVID-19 mitigation and treatment efforts, development of new services and creation of flexible staffing solutions to optimize medical and mental health response. The Committee will look out for Influenza like Illnesses (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI) among the students and refer on a need basis for further screening to the testing facilities.

Contact Tracing Procedures

The community medicine faculty associated with SHSC and EHSC will develop contact tracing protocols and procedures for the campus. Trained members of the Committees will conduct contact tracing on campus and care planning interviews with members of the university community who have tested positive or are presumed positive for COVID-19 and for those who have been in close contact with COVID-19 positive/presumed to be positive individuals. Disclosure of COVID-19 positive status is to be made mandatory for students and staff. A real time communication system is proposed to update COVID-19 positive cases on campus with linkages to Student Registration Numbers and Employee IDs through G-Student and G-Staff portals. A mobile application is to assist contact tracing.

A contact can be defined as any person who has been exposed to confirmed positive case of COVID-19 from 2 days before to 14 days after the onset of symptoms/test in the case of asymptomatic persons. Contacts are to be deemed at high risk if (a) the COVID-19 positive person did not wear mask or did not maintain social distance of one meter; (b) Contacts who spent more than 15 minutes even with a mask at a distance of less than one metre from a known COVID-19 positive individual; (c) Contacts who spent more than 15 minutes without mask at a distance of less than two metres from the COVID-19 positive individual; (d) those who came in physical contact with COVID-19 positive individual or shared surfaces without precaution (e) those who shared common transport within two rows of seats for more than 15 minutes even with a mask and (f) those who are in gatherings behind closed doors, even with mask.

The contact tracing and care plan interviews aim to:

- ✓ Ensure that the individual has access to appropriate medical care including follow-up testing;
- ✓ Explore the possible route of infection or exposure;
- ✓ Identify close contacts and other individuals who may be at risk for infection;
- ✓ Educate the individual on the need to quarantine or isolate and determine the individual's plan;
- ✓ Identify the support services and needs for the individual to quarantine or isolate smoothly.

Follow-up activity as a result of the contact-tracing interview may include but may not be limited to:

- ✓ Contacting HoI/HoD via the SHSC/EHSC to notify the exposure to a COVID-19 positive individual;
- ✓ Coordinating food, safe housing or transportation needs;
- ✓ Medical monitoring of COVID-19 symptoms;
- ✓ Medical and Mental Health Support.

Effective contact tracing relies on conducting interviews in a timely manner. Complying with requests for information from a contract tracer is an important expectation and a necessity to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The University will

protect the privacy and identity of individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 in accordance with applicable privacy laws and regulations. Heads of Institutions are to nominate points of contact to liaise with the Implementation Sub-Committee to enable contact tracing in a confidential manner. Contact tracing will go hand-in-hand with disinfection. Every Institution to have an Institutional Implementation Committee composed of hostel coordinators/wardens, faculty members, support staff and students in the ratio of 1:60 students. The Chairperson of this committee is to be the single point of contact between the Institution and the COVID-19 Committee.

Quarantine, Isolation and Care

The University would frequently update and communicate its policy on quarantine and isolation for students, faculty and staff. An individual who has been exposed to COVID-19 or who has been to an area of high-risk for transmission should self-quarantine for up to 14 days while they monitor themselves for symptoms. Individuals who isolate or quarantine should remain in their room or home and should not leave unless they need medical care or in case of an emergency. Those in quarantine are to monitor their vitals with reference to temperature, pulse and oxygen saturation online on a daily basis to enable red flags where required for medical attention. Testing and medical care should be sought by anyone who suspects symptoms. Individuals will be cleared from isolation or quarantine based on current best practices, such as a negative test result. A positive diagnostic test result will result in guidance to continue to isolate until considered recovered based on CDC guidelines.

When a student goes into quarantine or isolation:

- ✓ The on-campus quarantine space will be an alternate short-term living location for on-campus students – not a medical facility.
- ✓ Students who test positive are to be moved to notified isolation wards outside the campus or to go back home for the period of isolation. They are not to be housed in hostels on campus.
- ✓ SHSC does not operate an inpatient medical facility or provide 24/7 coverage. Students will be educated regarding after-hours care options and will be encouraged to seek care should conditions change outside of the student health center's hours of operation.
- ✓ Students experiencing new onset of symptoms while in quarantine need to be tested. The respective campuses will facilitate testing after informing the parents. Based on the test result the student needs to adhere to guidelines issued by local health authorities.
- ✓ Mental health care will be available to students for continuing care or psychological issues that develop during isolation or quarantine. A team of psychiatrists and psychologists of the University will provide mental health care.

- ✓ Students will be advised to return home to quarantine or isolate, when possible.
- ✓ Individuals who violate quarantine or isolation directives by moving around campus or attending work or class may be subject to disciplinary action by University authorities.
- ✓ Individuals may also be ordered to isolate or quarantine by the District/State public health officials at times.
- ✓ Isolation and quarantine guidelines will be dynamic based on expert opinion from organizations such as the WHO, CDC, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, State and local advisories and expert opinion of the medical staff at respective campuses. Faculty and staff who are isolated or quarantined are encouraged to follow up with their personal health care providers.

General Preventive Measures

For those on campus the following measures are to be taken:

- ✓ Use of Arogya Setu Mobile Application;
- ✓ Foot operated sanitizer dispensers to be used on entry;
- ✓ Passage through Non Contact Infrared Thermometers;
- ✓ Physical Distancing of at least two meters at all times;
- ✓ Avoid sharing of food and water;
- ✓ Not more than 3 persons in elevators at any given point of time;
- ✓ Participants in any gathering to be determined on the basis of maintainability of two meters distance between individuals to facilitate social distancing;
- ✓ Interface of staff to be minimized;
- ✓ Zero cash transactions at points of sale. G-pay to be used;
- ✓ Donning masks at all times on campus.

Individuals above 65 years of age, people with comorbidities and pregnant women are advised to stay at home.

Sanitization Protocols

- ✓ All vehicles entering the campus to be sanitized with 1% sodium hypochlorite solution;
- ✓ Frequent sanitization of indoor and frequently used spaces before and after use;
- ✓ Hand washing stations at regular distances across the campus;
- ✓ All work stations to be equipped with sanitizers;
- ✓ Frequently touched surfaces to be sanitized every two hours;
- ✓ Washrooms to be cleaned at regular intervals and cleaning logs to be maintained;
- ✓ Room cleaning checklists to be maintained in the hostels and students to sign the cleaning logs;

- ✓ One per cent sodium hypochlorite solution for disinfection and 70% isopropyl alcohol based sanitization to be used as per the prescription of World Health Organization, corroborated by the local advisory medical body. Disinfection of workspaces to be done within 24 hours of requisition.
- ✓ Teams are constituted for implementation of sanitization protocols.

Social Distancing Protocols

- ✓ Maintenance of employee and visitor entry and exit logs;
- ✓ De-densification of high movement areas;
- ✓ Vehicles to be parked at designated parking areas;
- ✓ Queue Managers
- ✓ Classrooms, laboratories and libraries to accommodate not more than 50% of students at any given point in time and seating to be marked for usage;
- ✓ Room configuration in the hostels to be reduced to facilitate social distancing;
- ✓ Opening of canteens in a phased manner;
- ✓ Usage of sports venues through a booking procedure.

Each constituent institution in Visakhapatnam campus is to put together an Institutional Implementation Committee with the hostel coordinators, a nodal officer from GIMSR, a medical expert from Community Medicine or Microbiology and a resident clinician. For the Hyderabad and Bengaluru campuses, pharmacists and nurses who are coopted are to be part of similar committees.

Communication

Communication of the University's dynamic COVID-19 Policy and implementation to be seamlessly communicated to all the stakeholders in broadcast mode through emails, newsletters and updates on the website. An email id covid19help@gitam.edu had been floated and a missed call number will shortly be opened to handle specific queries. Queries can be standard (answer already in FAQs) or non-standard (which require information from the respective departments). A ticketing system is also to be set up. Dashboards for the three campuses are to be maintained to communicate the exit strategies defined by the CDC/WHO as per the prevalence and infection curve. Wardens and academic counselors are also to be trained to handle queries by students and parents on the basis of the guidelines document.

Capacity Building

Engineering, security, housekeeping and food and beverages teams are to be trained in handling their respective duties in compliance with the COVID-19 Policy. Additional training is also facilitated for the non-teaching staff, faculty and Heads of the Departments and Institutions to discharge their duties in adherence with the new normal. Student representatives are also to be part of the training programs. Student representatives, hostel wardens and faculty nominees will be trained in conducting contact tracing interviews.

Accommodations have been prepared in Phase 1 for a total of 658 students in the Visakhapatnam Campus, 180 students in the Hyderabad Campus and 300 students in the Bengaluru Campus.

Leave policy for COVID-19 to include paid leave from 14-28 days with the Heads of Institutions/Directors/Establishment to be the sanctioning authorities.

Budgetary Allocations

The cost of sanitization of workspaces is estimated at Rs. 1 per square foot of space per month. A budget of rupees one crore has been approved.