
 सत्यमेव जयते Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India	 National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), AIIMS, New Delhi
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Advisory for IRCAs in view of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

People affected by Substance Use Disorders (SUD) are an especially vulnerable population to both – the COVID19 infection as well as the adverse impact of measures taken to respond to the pandemic (such as 'lockdown' or 'isolation / quarantine'). The pandemic and the lockdown imply that people who use alcohol or drugs find it difficult to procure the same. Those suffering from alcohol or drug use disorders are likely to experience intense craving (which is a distressing experience), as well as withdrawal symptoms with potentially serious and life-threatening consequences. Since the ongoing situation is stressful, there is a risk of relapse among even those who have been able to quit taking drugs in the past. Simultaneously, health care workers involved in providing prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services at IRCAs need to be protected from the risk of exposure of COVID19.

Thus, all IRCAs need to respond to the current situation based on the twin principles of

- (i) maintaining continuity of care and
- (ii) preventing the infection among patients and staff.

1. All institutions working in the field of drug prevention including the IRCAs may follow the necessary instructions and guidelines being issued by the Central / State Governments and their respective district administration to prevent and fight the menace of COVID-19. This includes adopting the preventive measures such as use of masks, physical-distancing, hand-washing or hand-sanitizing etc., as per the guidelines.
2. Treatment and care also needs to be provided to patients affected by alcohol or drug use disorders on outpatient basis. If technological resources are available, tele-health / tele-counselling services can be utilized to provide psychosocial support to the patients.
3. IRCA personnel who need online training / capacity building can contact NDDTC AIIMSon the email address aiims.naat@gmail.com
4. Specific advisory on alcohol withdrawal and its management has been presented below

Advisory on Alcohol Withdrawal during the lockdown

A lockdown situation, which entails non-availability of alcohol may be a blessing in disguise for some people who may utilize this opportunity to quit drinking altogether. However, it is also a significant challenge for a certain proportion of people with alcohol dependence who are at risk of experiencing alcohol withdrawal and its potential distressing and serious consequences.

People with Alcohol Dependence – upon cessation of alcohol use:	
Mild/moderate alcohol withdrawal (85-90% of cases)	Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely psychological symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Anxiety, irritability, restlessness ✚ Craving i.e., an irresistible urge to consume alcohol. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of people with psychological symptoms will get better within a few days with adequate fluids and nutritional supplementation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological and physical symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Difficulty in sleeping ✚ Tremors ✚ Sweating ✚ Palpitations ✚ Headache ✚ Stomach upset, poor appetite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the nearest facility for prescription of appropriate medicines of benzodiazepine group, (such as diazepam or lorazepam) and high doses of vitamin B (particularly Thiamine, Vit B1). [CAUTION: All medications must be taken only under the prescription and advise of a qualified medical professional].
Severe withdrawal (about 10-15% of cases)	Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seizures (convulsions) • Delirium Tremens (comprised of confusion, disturbed level of consciousness, impaired awareness of surroundings, hallucinations and abnormal behaviour) • Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome (a variety of neurological and cognitive symptoms) especially common in malnourished patients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires emergency medical care and hospitalization at a facility which is equipped to deal with such cases.

**In case of further assistance, you can also call on Toll free Drugs Help line
1800 11 0031**