

Syngene

Putting Science to Work

Proactive COVID-19 testing: **The next step in learning to live with the pandemic**



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on the lives and livelihoods of people globally. India ranks 2nd in terms of infection with more than 48 lakh positive cases. While the mortality rate is significantly below the global average, the number of daily positive cases being reported has reached a staggering 90,000 and the number continues to climb. While halting the spread of infection is the ultimate aim, at this stage extending the use of testing to generate data and improve management and forward planning is the next logical step. Ramping up testing capacity to cover as much of the population as possible would benefit public health authorities and organisations alike. Data published on the ICMR website indicates that India has conducted close to 5.72 crore COVID-19 tests so far.

After the initial weeks of near-total lockdown, the country is cautiously resuming economic activities. Organisations across the board, including Syngene, have implemented safety measures to keep employees and facilities safe. However, as the prevalence of infection increases, it is important to continue to look for ways to strengthen protective measures. At Syngene, we are using extensive testing to keep our employees and their families safe while offering testing services to other companies for the same purpose.

A case for proactive testing

Proactive testing is a critical element in restraining the spread of the infection around us. By identifying positive cases early on – particularly those that are asymptomatic – and enabling them to isolate from others, we can restrict further transmission. Testing also provides the basis for identifying primary contacts of an infected person to prevent further spreading of the infection.

For an organisation, proactive testing helps in assessing the prevalence of infection within the workforce in order to be better prepared, plan ahead and invoke the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) if required. This significantly helps in mitigating adverse impact on operations and ensuring that organisations are not caught off guard.

Syngene's experience with proactive testing

Syngene conducted a proactive pilot of RT-PCR testing on a random sample of its total workforce during July-August 2020. Approximately 20% of the employees were covered. COO, Mahesh Bhargat said, "This approach helped in making an initial assessment of the prevalence of infection as well as testing the logistics required in the run-up to full-scale testing of all employees. By quarantining not just the positive cases but also their primary contacts the spread of the infection to others on campus was restricted and operations were largely unaffected." In fact,

during the exercise, an asymptomatic 'super spreader' was identified and immediately quarantined. This prevented the individual from further passing on the infection to others on campus, as well as protecting his home environment. This early action prevented the shutdown of an entire facility with significant consequences for customers and colleagues. Key learnings from the pilot exercise can be summarised as below:

- A random sample of approximately 20% of the total population helps gain good insights into the prevalence of infection
- Cost of conducting proactive tests are not high and the benefits certainly outweigh the costs
- The organisation was better prepared to deal with employees testing positive consequently there was no impact on operations
- Primary contact tracing was initiated immediately, and this helped in arresting further transmission
- RT-PCR test continues to be the main form of testing; ELISA testing only helps in surveillance
- Repeated testing will identify potential cases thereby progressively reducing the number of positive cases
- Employees welcomed the testing initiative as an additional form of personal protection

Syngene has now scaled up its proactive testing to cover all onsite employees. We have a tried and tested internal protocol to handle any positive case on campus and arrangements are made with hospitals to admit any employee who tests positive, as well as with hotels to accommodate employees who need to be quarantined.



Testing support to other organisations

Syngene has tied up with more than 50 organisations to test samples taken from their employees including: Cipla, Tata Aerospace and Defence (Tata Advanced Materials Ltd., Tata Advanced Systems Ltd., Tata Power SED) Baxter and Aurigene. A tie-up with ELCITA (Electronics City Industrial Township Authority) allows its 200-member organisations to use Syngene testing services for their employees.

With our experience in conducting testing, we support organisations as required:

- Help to establish sample size considering the total on-campus employee population
- Onsite sampling by experienced technicians at customer premises and collection of samples
- Professional management of health records
- Advice on appropriate type of testing methodology (PCR, rapid test, antibody test etc)
- Rapid turnaround of test results – in line with govt requirements
- Advice on support for positive cases
- Anonymised data provided in real time
- Additional testing in case of outbreaks can be arranged at short notice

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major global health crisis of unprecedented nature. At Syngene, we are committed to using our scientific expertise and our world class resources not only for the safety of our employees and our work place but also to support the industry, government and the community in the fight against the virus.



