

Karnataka allows 50% of IT/ITeS, biotech workforce to return to office from April 20

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We will have to learn to live with precautions against the coronavirus, says Deputy CM
The Karnataka government has allowed up to 50 per cent of the workforce of IT/ITeS and biotech companies to work from their offices from April 20, with the balance working from home.

The government has instructed the companies to install adequate screening facilities at offices/factories and introduce safety measures before arranging for passes for the workforce. Transport and other facilities have to be provided, the companies have been told.

At a video conference with company leaders on Friday, Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister CN Ashwathnarayan gave IT/ITeS and biotech companies a list of dos and don'ts. Among the participants in the meet were Kris Gopalakrishnan, Chairman of Karnataka's Vision Group on IT, Biocon CMD Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Prashant Prakash of Accel Partners, Shrikumar Suryanarayan of Able India and Prakash Gopalan of BSNL.

Need for precautions

Once the restrictions are relaxed, the risk of the infection spreading is high, the honchos were told. "Precautions are to be taken and early efforts must be made to prevent infections," said Ashwathnarayan. "But we will have to learn to live with precautions against the coronavirus in the coming days. Awareness among the people about this issue has increased, too. Continuous screening can help detect infections and treating such persons will help bring the situation under control."

Companies expressed concerns about handling the situation if an employee tested positive after resuming work, he said, adding that they sought guidelines for the same. "They have been promised that appropriate guidelines would be provided in consultation with the Department of Health and Family Welfare. Companies have also agreed to follow measures such as maintenance of cleanliness and hygiene, social distancing and screening facilities in the premises," he said.

No cause for lay-offs

Ashwathnarayan requested the companies not to shut shop or lay off employees citing the pandemic. "It is not right for companies to shut shop or lay off employees citing not receiving new projects. Finding new jobs at this point of time will be difficult. Instead, companies could find better ways of dealing with the situation including measures such as pay adjustments rather than resorting to retrenchment. This opinion found support during the discussions," he said.

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He told reporters later that the companies had demanded passes for their employees. The government will provide the required facilities, he added.

Transport facilities

“The lockdown will continue with no cab or metro services. Besides, there will be no public transport till further orders,” said Ashwathnarayan. “Since public places are shut down, there may not be issuance of passes. But the Union Home Ministry has allowed one person per two-wheeler and two persons per car. The ban on inter-State and inter-district travel will continue. Movement is restricted already due to the closure of malls, hotels and restaurants and educational institutions.”

“Due to the non-availability of taxis, disinfected BMTC buses can be rented for facilitating commuting by following relevant safety protocols,” he added.

Companies all praise

The State government came in for much praise during the interaction with the corporate leaders, said Ashwathnarayana. “The representatives of the IT/ITeS and biotech sectors praised the cooperation offered by the Karnataka government during the lockdown. It is a matter of pride for us that our companies have been able to make a name for themselves internationally by continuing with their work and keeping their international commitments during this period. Bengaluru has handled this situation better than many other global cities,” he added.