

Coronavirus outbreak: India plans ayurvedic trials on patients soon

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India may soon start trials of treatment protocols on (Covid-19) patients using ayurvedic medicines.

On the preventive front, many states, including Haryana, Goa and Kerala, have started using ayurvedic medicines for asymptomatic patients and even frontline workers.

“The had invited suggestions from ayurvedic and homeopathy practitioners across India. They got around 2,000 proposals. Now, the task force (formed for scientific validation of and traditional medicine formulas through research institutions) that has been going through these proposals has shortlisted a protocol. It is expected to be notified soon,” said an industry source, who has been attending meetings with the ministry.

Once notified, these would then be tried on patients suffering from Covid-19 — first on asymptomatic ones or non-severe patients and also suspects.

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Addressing the nation on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked about traditional home remedies (like drinking warm water through the day and taking home-made immunity boosters).

He had earlier held a video conference with ayush practitioners. The task force has members from the department of biotechnology (DBT), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and also ayush practitioners. It is deliberating on inter-drug reactions if a patient is administered an ayurvedic medicine to fight Covid-19 along with the regular allopathic therapy.

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Speaking to Business Standard, ayush minister Shripad Y Naik said the ministry’s task force is scrutinising the proposals submitted by ayush practitioners. Then, it will send it to research organisations like the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) that is working actively on the Covid crisis.

“The ICMR would then revert to the ministry with its opinion – whether or not to go ahead with the line of therapy. In China, they have used traditional medicines along with allopathic drugs. We are awaiting a final decision on this and can expect it within this month,” Naik said.

He felt that since there is no established vaccine available for the novel coronavirus, can be useful even as a preventive measure.

Meanwhile, some states like Haryana, Kerala, Goa have already started using it as a preventive medicine along with regular allopathic medicines. Sources said that some government hospitals are also using it to treat asymptomatic patients and those under quarantine.

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“Ayurvedic texts have talked about epidemics, ways to control them and also illnesses that have very similar symptoms that the novel has. While there has been no clinical study on patients, these therapies have been tried and tested over centuries. A singular treatment line is unlikely as is highly customised according to the person’s prakriti or nature,” said Partap Chauhan, founder director of Jiva Ayurveda.

His organisation, with over 500 doctors, consults around 8,000 patients every day across the globe. Chauhan claimed that he has been getting distress calls from New York, where citizens want to know about simple home remedies they can adopt to stay safe.

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In the first week of April, the Kerala government decided to use ayurveda to mitigate the spread of Covid. It classified people into seven categories for the purpose of administering medicines. Kerala chief minister has already said that Ayur Raksha clinics would be started at ayurveda dispensaries and hospitals. Even those recovering from Covid-19 would be given ayurvedic therapy to restore health.

The task force, too, is working on multiple protocols to be recommended for different groups of people having various underlying illnesses.

The industry feels that production of medicines, according to the protocol, would not be an uphill task as raw material is easily available and there are enough manufacturers in the country. Chandubhai Bhanushali, owner of Ayurchem and also the president of the Ayurvedic Drug Manufacturers Association (ADMA), that is affiliated to the CII, said that there are 9,500 ayurvedic companies in the country. Of this, only about 2 per cent are large firms like Baidyanath, Emami or Dabur.

There is also a network of around 600 ayurvedic hospitals across India that can roped in to treat asymptomatic or suspect patients, the industry felt.

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Telangana has already notified ayurvedic hospitals for Covid-19 treatment. Whether these hospitals would act as quarantine wards following the treatment protocol of allopathy or would use ayurvedic therapy is not clear.

Whether or not the government recommends ayurvedic treatment, Indians have already started adopting this branch of medicine as a preventive step.

Online pharmacies have seen a spike in their ayurvedic drug sales. Prashant Tandon, chief executive officer (CEO) of 1mg, said it has seen a two-fold jump in sales of ayurvedic medicines and over-the-counter immunity boosting medicines in the last few weeks. Dhaval Shah, co-founder of PharmEasy, said sales of ashwagandha, moringa and chawanprash (immunity boosters) have shot up, post Covid.