

Ensuring medicine supply to patients during COVID-19

Read how two sites within the Novartis Technical Operations (NTO) network ensured business continuity at scale and speed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Kalwe, India: staying on site to ensure leprosy drug production

Multidrug therapy (MDT) was a major breakthrough in the fight against leprosy and remains the cornerstone of the global leprosy elimination strategy. The Sandoz Kalwe site, located north of Mumbai on India's west coast, manufactures and supplies MDT to the World Health Organization as part of the Novartis pledge to donate MDT medicines to eliminate leprosy. But in March, manufacturing and supplying MDT became a challenge as COVID-19 spread and India ordered a nationwide lockdown, including the partial closure of air and sea routes.

People affected by leprosy are often marginalized from health services, and disability and disease transmission could worsen due to a lack of timely diagnosis and treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing this, associates at the Kalwe site have been working relentlessly to help ensure a continuous MDT supply to these vulnerable patients.

Despite stringent safety measures, some associates at the site tested positive for COVID-19, thereby compromising the workforce capacity. Site management immediately activated an emergency management plan to maintain operations, and the premises were completely sanitized.

In a few days, arrangements to tackle the COVID-19 situation at the site were made for those associates who stayed on to continue manufacturing MDT and other immunosuppressant medicines. These included 24/7 medical help, food, bedding and laundry cleaning for the 160 associates residing on site, and regular disinfection of all the areas they visited. Another team stayed at a nearby hotel, ready to replace the first group after a few weeks. All associates were tested for COVID-19 before being allowed back on site.

Additionally, transport was organized for colleagues who could not reach the site on their own, and groceries were provided to associates and their families who had no access to essential commodities due to the lockdown.

Through dedication and hard work, the teams in Kalwe were able to overcome the challenges and completely restore supplies of MDT medicines within 9 days.

Kurtköy, Turkey: maintaining focus on malaria in the face of COVID-19



Group of Novartis Technical Operations (NTO) Turkey, Kurtköy facility team members.

For the past two decades, Novartis has contributed to the fight against malaria, a mosquito-borne disease that kills one child every two minutes. The Novartis facility in Kurtköy, Turkey has manufactured the majority of our antimalarial treatments since 2015, helping to deliver more than 200 million treatments.

In mid-March, life suddenly stopped in Turkey due to COVID-19, with the majority of companies shutting down and people staying home. For Kurtköy, it was the opposite. The site implemented a comprehensive emergency plan to help ensure a continuous medicine supply while keeping associates healthy. For instance, associates with chronic diseases were not allowed to work on site.

Although COVID-19 cases increased day by day in Turkey, thanks to stringent health and safety measures and the efforts of associates, Kurtköy remained COVID-19 free. Further, despite the workforce shortage, challenges in material supply and disruptions to worldwide logistics, the site was able to continue the seamless production of our antimalarial treatments and contributed to deliver treatments to 6 million patients during the peak of the pandemic.

Notably, Kurtköy did not just maintain production; it ramped up capacity during the crisis, enabling Novartis to deliver treatment orders on time to customers. This was extremely important as governments struggled to receive and distribute lifesaving health commodities.

Ensuring medicine supply to patients to treat leprosy and malaria during COVID-19

Malaria

For the past two decades, Novartis has contributed to the fight against malaria. Today, the Novartis Malaria program is one of the largest access-to-medicine programs in the healthcare industry.

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