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# City's science institutes race to fight Covid-19

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Pune: From setting up large-scale testing units to designing low-cost medical equipment, the city's science and technology institutes are racing to boost the country's fight against Covid-19.

"IISER Pune is preparing to set up a Covid-19 testing facility on campus. Our testing team is working to establish the required physical infrastructure and to get standard operating procedures in place. The institute hopes to begin testing soon, pending a review and approval of our preparations from the ICMR," an official statement from Indian Institute of Science Education and Research said.

Scientists from the CSIR- National Chemical Laboratory (CSIR-NCL), Pune, have also been working on various projects since the Covid-19 lockdown was enforced.

"Our research recommended that 0.02-0.05% (200 to 500 ppm) of sodium hypochlorite (bleach) is the safest quantity for disinfectant tunnels. The NCL has already developed or is in the process of developing scalable chemical processes for indigenous production of key starting materials, important drug intermediates and active pharmaceutical ingredients that can be taken up by pharmaceutical industries. BMek, a CSIR-NCL's Venture Center incubate has developed a non-contact handheld digital IR thermometer," said Prabhakar Ingle, senior principal scientist at NCL.

Ingle added the organisation has also developed a membrane-based oxygen enrichment unit that can be used by Covid-19 patients if they need oxygen therapy. It's also working on repurposing drugs.

Prashant K Dhakephalkar, director of the Agharkar Research Institute, said they are making a rapid diagnostic test kit for Covid-19. "We will be able to develop these kits for large-scale use within a few months. We have developed a sanitiser as per the formula prescribed by the World Health Organisation. We have already provided 2,500 bottles to the police and citizens. Another project in the pipeline is a disinfectant shower tunnel which does not use sodium hypochlorite," Dhakephalkar said.

The National Centre for Cell Science (NCCS), which received a go-ahead to test for SARS-CoV-2, has tested over 200 samples since April 25. It received the nod from the Department of Biotechnology, Indian Council of Medical Research and the state government

Pune also has the National Institute of Virology, which has been spearheading testing in the country.

The city is also home to scientists, doctors and researchers who have been working to fill gaps in awareness and response to Covid-19.