

TB Machines approved by ICMR for COVID-19 testing

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Diagnostic machines used to test drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) have now been approved by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for conducting Covid-19 tests.

“ICMR has recommended use of Truenat beta CoV test on Truelab workstation validated by ICMR as a screening test. Also, use of US-FDA approved closed real time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) systems like GeneXpert and Roche Cobas - 6800/800 have been approved under emergency use,” ICMR has stated in its guidance.

Key Highlights

- Over 800 Truenat machines already in place across India primarily for use in detecting drug-resistant TB, of which close to 400 were in government set-ups. Out of which 257 are in Andhra Pradesh alone, at district and sub-district level.
- While GeneXpert is a cartridge-based technology, Truenat is smaller, battery operated, requires minimal training and is usable even in smaller settings such as the Primary Health Centre. It uses a chip-based technology and takes just up to 60 minutes for a test, screening or confirmatory.
- Of the 800 machines, 150 to 200 machines are two-way and can handle 16 to 24 samples, there are about 50 four-way machines and the rest of them are single-way machines, which can process 8 to 12 samples at a time.
- Once the throat and nasal swab sample is safely collected by trained technicians wearing personal protective equipment, it is rendered non-infectious in the machine and results are obtained between 30 and 60 minutes
- The cost of a test on Truenat will be ₹1,000-₹1,500, the executive said. This is a fifth of what it

costs today. While Molbio wants to expand its manufacturing capacity and place more machines on ground, the executive said that they were awaiting for the government directives on the number of machines and tests needed in each state.

- One big concern is India's inability to manufacture local kits. "We are mostly dependent on imports from the US or other countries for acquiring kits," said the executive.

SOURCE:*The Hindu*