

Mumbai Cargo: The key lynchpin in the supply chain for COVID-19 vaccines and essential pharma supplies

Mumbai International Airport talks to International Airport Review about the role the airport has played in the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine and other essential pharmaceuticals.



The recent overwhelming challenge of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic revealed air freight and cargo as a crucial aspect of the aviation industry. In fact, it would be fair to say that for the aviation industry, air cargo was that single bright ray of sunlight shining through the otherwise ominous clouds of the pandemic's impact. Keeping critical supply chains open, the air cargo community remained fully functional, even during nationwide lockdowns, to cater to the greater need to mobilise and supply essential life-saving items right from the very start of the outbreak.

Situated in the heart of the financial capital of India, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, otherwise known as Mumbai International Airport (BOM) handles a large portion of EXIM pharmaceutical air cargo movements in India and has a vast

experience in handling sensitive pharmaceutical shipments. Moreover, the air cargo terminal in Mumbai is equipped with avant-garde infrastructure including Asia's largest temperature-controlled Export Pharma Excellence Centre, a Pharma-dedicated Import Cold Zone, an indigenously developed 'Cooltainer' facility and the largest hub for Envirotainer movements with over 60 power outlets for processing pharma active containers to name a few. Since the outbreak of the global pandemic, Mumbai Airport has left no stone unturned to support the air cargo industry in transporting life-saving medical supplies such as personal protective equipment (PPE), and vital medical equipment as well as oxygen cylinders, oxygen generators and COVID-19 vaccines across the globe.

International vaccine distribution

Being a leading expert in the movement of time- and temperature-sensitive pharmaceutical goods, the airport had extended its support towards the equitable distribution of the vaccine in early January 2021; on the first day, the airport aided the transport of over 2.92 million doses of the vaccine to 22 destinations in India. As of 30 June 2021, the cargo team at Mumbai has tirelessly facilitated the overall distribution of over 310 tonnes of COVID-19 vaccines, consisting of approximately 107.15 million doses, across over 139 international and domestic destinations through more than 390 flights. With the ramping up of the vaccination drive within the country, Mumbai has so far supported the distribution of approximately 51.33 million doses of the vaccine across 45 domestic destinations as of June 2021. The highest domestic movement of vaccines from Mumbai has been observed to be towards Kerala, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh.

The airport's trailblazing initiatives also resulted in BOM becoming the first airport in the country to export the vaccine to international destinations. Over the first half of this year, we facilitated the distribution of 55.82 million doses of the vaccine, weighing approximately 180 tonnes to over 90 international destinations via over 100 flights. Dhaka, Morocco, Abuja, Riyadh and Rangun emerged as the destinations with the

highest movements to and from Mumbai, while Emirates, Turkish Airways, Air India, Qatar Airways and Royal Air Maroc were revealed as the top five airlines transporting the highest number of vaccine shipments.



Optimizing pharma-dedicated corridors

Supporting the healthcare sector, we have been prioritizing the shipments of vaccinations and the SOPs implemented by the airport in anticipation of the vaccine distribution, which saw the terminal register an average cargo processing time of just 10 minutes for domestic delivery and 25 minutes for international, including offloading and storage. Given the requirement for timely and temperature-controlled requirements for the vaccine shipments, the existing infrastructure at Mumbai enables us to offer a continuous temperature-controlled passage and seamless processing of essential pharma goods through the airport. The airport deployed a dedicated COVID-task force in order to reduce dwell time and facilitate advanced planning and collaboration between the airport and all stakeholders in this process. It has also initiated a round-the-clock Customer Service Cell for COVID-19 vaccine EXIM consignments, in order to address customer queries, pre-alerts and status updates.

In addition to the vital distribution of vaccines, we also catered to the need of the hour during the outbreak of the second wave of the pandemic in the country. With aid pouring in from across the globe, the airport facilitated the transportation of COVID-relief supplies such as oxygen concentrators, vials of relief medicines to name a few. Witnessing the arrival of the first shipment on 26 April 2021, the airport has since then processed over 1,473 flights, carrying over 923 tonnes of relief supplies, originating from 40 destinations across the globe such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, Brussels amongst others. Upon arrival, Mumbai's dedicated COVID-19 Task Force ensures the timely processing of these supplies for further distribution to districts in Maharashtra as well as Gujarat, Delhi, Telangana, Chattisgarh, Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh amongst others. Prioritising the offloading and processing of COVID-19 relief supplies, the cargo team at Mumbai has achieved a record dwell time of 15 minutes. This marks a new milestone for the entire air cargo community in Mumbai.

With the change in tide of the second wave of COVID-19 in India, [Mumbai International Airport](#) continues to be determined in aiding the nation and international countries towards a seamless and efficient transportation of crucial medical supplies and COVID - 19 vaccines. As the first airport in India and third in Asia to achieve the IATA CEIV certification, as well as being the only Indian airport in a strategic partnership with Pharma.aero, we are well-positioned to support, maintain and optimise pharma-dedicated corridors globally and support the world in its fight against COVID-19.

Article Link:

<https://www.internationalairportreview.com/article/162189/mumbai-cargo-the-key-lynchpin-in-the-covid-19-vaccines-supply-chain/>