

Kalaburagi first K'taka city to deploy auto ambulances

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Bengaluru:

Kalaburagi, facing acute shortage of ambulances, became the only city in Karnataka to deploy autorickshaw ambulances to ferry Covidpositive patients to hospitals free of cost. The service with a fleet of five auto ambulances began late Tuesday evening and aims at ensuring patients reach hospitals without much wait.

Three of the autorickshaws ply during day and two at night. They are stationed at the city municipal commissioner's office in Kalaburagi, about 570km from Bengaluru.

Kalaburagi city corporation commissioner Snehal Lokhande told **TOI** the city has nearly 100 ambulances, but most areas are accessible only by autorickshaws. The service was used by seven people in the night when the service began, and 25 on Wednesday.

“The district reports 700-800 new cases every day and the city accounts for 400-500 of them. Only 10% of those cases require hospitalisation. As the city has many narrow lanes, movement of ambulances is not easy. Hence, we need autorickshaws too,” said Lokhande.

The city administration has provided PPEs to the auto drivers.



Auto driver Ravichandra D volunteered to ferry Covid-19 patients in Kalaburagi

We've no other work, would like to help patients: Auto drivers

If the patient's condition demands a fullfledged ambulance, then the auto driver will get back to the authorities to arrange for the same. Autorickshaws are sanitized after every trip and they can be used by the public to go to vaccination centres too. “Thanks to lockdown, we have no other work and would like to help patients,” said Shakeel Patel, an auto driver who has volunteered for the service.

Ravichandra D, 32, another auto volunteer, said it’s the plight of patients that made him come forward to do his bit. “On Wednesday, I ferried five patients. I take precautions like using a mask and sanitiser,” he said. Ensuring the patient reaches the designated hospital at the earliest is his only concern, he added.

According to Lokhande, the idea behind introducing auto ambulances is not only about shortage of ambulances. He said many patients have been requesting autorickshaw drivers to reach out to hospitals and many drivers refuse fearing the virus spread and stigma.

“Many patients have tried using public transport, but that’s not advised keeping the virus-control measures in mind. Some auto drivers have volunteered to work with the city administration. We are aiding them with daily allowances and free fuel,” he explained.