

# ICMR conducts successful trial run of blood bag delivery under iDrone initiative

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The Indian Council of Medical Reserach (ICMR) in New Delhi. File | Photo Credit: V.V. Krishnan

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Wednesday successfully conducted a trial run of delivery of blood bags by drones under its iDrone initiative. The trial run, as part of a pathbreaking validation study, has been undertaken for the first time in the country by the ICMR; Lady Hardinge Medical College (LHMC); Government Institute of Medical Sciences

(GIMS), Greater Noida; and the Jaypee Institute of Information Technology (JIIT), Noida, a release issued by the Health Ministry said.

The inaugural trial flight carried 10 units of whole blood samples from the GIMS and LHMC in visual line of sight. “LHMC and GIMS are included as centres for supplying blood bags and testing of the samples, while JIIT is acting as the implementation centre for drone sorties. The protocol development, study designing, implementation, and coordination of the project are being undertaken by scientists from ICMR-Headquarters,” the Ministry said.

“The i-DRONE was first used during the COVID-19 pandemic by the ICMR for distributing vaccines to unreachable areas. Today, we are transporting blood and blood-related products which are supposed to be kept at a low temperature. After the experiment, we found that not only can we maintain the temperature, there was also no damage to the products transported. We sent another sample through an ambulance to see if there are no differences in the samples sent using the two modes — then this drone will be used all over India,” Rajiv Bahl, Director General, ICMR, said.

Dr. Bahl said that clarity on challenge mapping and identifying possible solutions can be achieved by developing indigenous capacities in research, and the introduction of innovations and technologies in the mainstream.

Meanwhile, investigators from the LHMC, GIMS and JIIT will further conduct drone flights to validate the quality of packed red blood cells, fresh frozen plasma, and platelets in this study. The findings of this study will provide scientific evidence from India for examining the impact of drone transportation on blood products. It will lead to development of standard operating procedures (SOP) for wider applicability, and the use of drones for the delivery of blood bags and components. Additionally, it will provide answers to the question of whether drones shall be used as a method of transportation for temperature sensitive blood products in remote locations of the country, the release noted.

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