Despite Khader’s letters, guidelines haven’t been issued

Despite the worldwide focus on Ebola, the Karnataka government seems to be struggling to get a response from the Centre to establish protocol to deal with a situation if a person tests positive for the virus.

Minister for Health and Family Welfare U.T. Khader told The Hindu on Wednesday that although he had written two letters in this regard to the Union Health Ministry and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the last two months, guidelines had not been issued. He said he would write a third letter to the Centre on Thursday as “it could not be taken lightly now”.

“What will happen if a positive case is detected here? Although we are screening people arriving at the airports in the State, how do the doctors and paramedical staff handle them? What precautions are to be followed by them? I had requested the Centre to release the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) guidelines and also train teams from every State, specifically to deal with Ebola cases. But this is yet to happen,” he said.

The issue came back to focus following the quarantining of an Indian national, returning from Liberia, who tested positive for the virus in New Delhi. The demand from Mr. Khader is a “uniform protocol” for all States to be followed in such a situation.
This has also resulted in a situation where Karnataka presently does not have a trained team of doctors who can coordinate and work on an Ebola case. Given, the worldwide focus on the matter, experts say it is “imperative” that such measures are put in place immediately.

National centre sought
Mr. Khader said he had also requested the setting up of a national quarantine centre so that patients identified could be isolated in a Tertiary Care Govt. Health Centre in New Delhi. “The Centre is yet to respond to this,” he said.

Quarantine centres
Although the government has identified the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Chest Diseases (RGICD) in Bengaluru and Wenlock Hospital in Mangaluru as nodal quarantine centres, the State was not sure about what to do after quarantining.

“How long can we keep patients in these centres? There will be panic all over. It is advisable to send anyone detected in the country to an identified centre in Delhi,” he said.

The Minister, who congratulated the team at the New Delhi airport for identifying the case, said if the Centre did not train teams for all States, the Karnataka government may be forced to take up the initiative.