

# Govt. to frame norms for drones to carry vaccines

Focus is on air safety during BVLOS drone operations

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The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has invited expression of interest from drone operators to “develop a delivery model” for using drones to deliver COVID-19 vaccines in remote and hard to reach areas in the country.

The tender document lays down the technical specifications required, which include the ability of drones to fly “beyond visual line of sight [BVLOS]”.

While government rules now permit only those drone operations that are within the visual range, the ICMR project comes at a time when the Ministry of Civil Aviation has allowed 20 entities to conduct trials for long-range or “beyond vi-

sual line of sight” drone flights.

These experimental flights start from June 18 and are likely to conclude by October. Based on learnings from these test flights, the government will frame the guidelines for BVLOS operations and they could be finalised by March 31 next year.

“Once the trials are over, different entities will submit their flight data and proof of concept, based on which the draft guidelines will be framed. Our task is to ensure air safety during BVLOS drone operations. These include ensuring that the drones stick to the assigned flight path, maintain robust communication and control link and are able to withstand the vagaries of nature,” said Amber Dubey,

Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, and head of the drones division.

Drone companies said the guidelines would pave the way for drone deliveries in rural, remote and peri-urban settings to begin with, and similar operations in urban areas would take much longer.

## Ice boxes

“Vaccines are carried in ice boxes containing dry ice in order to maintain required temperature levels. These boxes contain data loggers, which have 4G network connectivity to relay live recording of temperature through a mobile app to an operator on the ground,” said Wing Commander S. Vijay (retired), Chief Operating Officer, Skye Air Mobility.