

# **Suggested guidelines on the role of labels in the essential supply chain during the Coronavirus pandemic**

*Compiled by the Label Academy and FINAT*

**Of interest to all those involved directly or indirectly in the front line of fighting the spread and treatment of the Coronavirus virus – including label materials suppliers, ink and toner manufacturers, printing plate and sundries suppliers, thermal ribbons producers, label converters and overprinting equipment manufacturers.**

## **Introduction**

The wider label industry has been largely overlooked in its key role of supporting and supplying all those necessary label products and components that enable manufacturing, distribution, tracking and tracing of, not only essential medical or hospital goods to be continued during the Coronavirus lockdown, but also in enabling the day-to-day infrastructure that society needs to continue to be supported and supplied with all the necessary medicines, food and household products, as well as the automated systems, computers and printers that enable distribution to take place.

The whole global manufacturing, supply and usage chain today relies on labels of many different kinds and types for conveying information related to movement, traceability, product safety and health information, size or weight, contents information, ingredients, safety usage, instructions for use, and manufacturer. This information is required by all countries under consumer, sector, product or environmental legislation. It is also essential in helping to control and protect against fraud and counterfeiting.

This essential role of labels, and the materials, technology and print solutions – using mechanical or digital means – to produce them, needs to be fully recognized as essential supplies/suppliers if feeding, treating and supporting front-line medical, care and health employees, and all global consumers continues, otherwise the global measures being taken against Coronavirus will rapidly falter and more people than necessary may die or be denied essential medicines or food.

So what labels and label solutions should ideally be classified as essential supplies for manufacturing and distribution during the pandemic?

## **Medical and hospital labels**

Labels are widely used throughout the whole medical and hospital chain for the identification, tracking, tracing and processing of everything from patient and medical products identification and subsequent tracking, through to sample identification and testing, prescription issuing, warehousing, storage and issuing of supplies, blood bag identification, autoclaving and sterilization, etc.

Many of these labels may also need to be overprinted with patient name, details, barcodes or sequential codes or numbers in the medical or hospital environment using computerized inkjet or thermal printer technology, with special ink cartridges or thermal ribbons. Without these labels and facilities, whole identification or testing procedures may come to a complete halt.

Specially coated or treated labels are also used for demanding applications, such as biomonitoring, anti-microbial performance, time and/or temperature monitoring, patient compliance packaging, freshness indicators, light protection, etc.

The manufacture and shipping of all types of medical and hospital labels should be regarded as essential supplies.

### **Pharmaceutical labels**

The whole global pharmaceutical supply chain from manufacturer, through distribution, pharmacy handling and the final prescribing of individual patient prescriptions is totally dependent on the use of labels. Three main types of labels are required to make this chain of supply and prescribing work:

1. Track and trace labels that enable the whole supply chain of medicines and medical products to be followed from source to consumer. Also essential as a tool to prevent or minimise the counterfeiting of medical goods
2. Product labels on medicines and medical products that meet national and international pharmaceutical legislation requirements. Essential for the global pharmaceutical industry and for all users of medicines
3. Prescription labels that have to be issued by each individual pharmacy when dispensing medicines to the consumer/patient. These labels are usually part printed with the pharmacy name and then overprinted in the pharmacy – or hospital – with individual patient names and prescription details.

All three types of labels are absolutely essential in enabling the world of labels and pharmacy dispensing to continue functioning.

### **Logistics, distribution warehouse labels**

The world of supply and distribution is today totally automated using computerised systems to print everything from address and shipping labels, through barcoded automated monitoring and checking stages, using scanners to read labels in warehouses, at each loading, unloading or delivery stage, and on to the retailer, pharmacy, hospital or consumer end-user for monitoring the progress, tracking and tracing of almost everything that today moves by road, rail, sea or air.

Without such labels the national and global distribution and supply chains would most likely come to a complete halt, or very severe delays introduced, with goods being lost, increased theft, and significantly reduced accountability. Their manufacture is a necessary requirement that should fall under essential manufacturing.

### **Food and drink labels**

Almost all food and drink product labels have to carry legislative information that enables the items to meet the necessary requirements in terms of contents, specific ingredients, storage or use by information, health or safety requirements, manufacturer or supplier, possible country of origin, or other specified data.

If labels are not able to be produced and supplied to food or drinks product manufacturers for labeling purposes, then their products cannot be distributed or sold. The consumer or product legislation requirements are mandatory. If not labeled, goods will not be available in retailers or available to the public. Even in the basic of senses, labels for all food or drinks products sold to the public are therefore a mandatory requirement and should be regarded as essential for manufacturing purposes.

Other food labels are used by pre-packers during the weighing and labeling of products such as fresh meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, bakery products, sliced meats, cheeses. These products need to carry weight/price information which is generated at the point of wrapping or packing using thermal label materials and ribbons.

### **Household and consumer goods labels**

Like food and drink, the labeling of products for use by consumers in their daily household life is an essential requirement under a whole range of national and international consumer legislation that covers contents, safety and health requirements, usage instructions, handling, storage, disposal and much more. It applies to under-the-sink products, hair care products, shower gels, cleansers, polishes, washing-up or washing machine products, sprays, soaps and detergents, etc. Indeed, pretty well every consumer and household product required on a day-to-day basis.

Legislation requires that all household and consumer products must carry the required labels before they can be sold in retail outlets. Without such labels, their sale would mean breaking the law. Labeling is again a mandatory requirement and label manufacture essential.

### **Industrial manufacturing**

While not all industrial manufacturing is currently necessary or required, the labeling of products urgently being manufactured for the hospital/medical markets, such as respirators, beds, screens, ventilators, masks, sanitizer sprays, etc, is obviously a current essential priority, together with all the required warehousing, distribution and shipping labels.

### **DISCLAIMER**

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