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## Drugmakers step on it to meet August 1 deadline to sport bar/ QR codes

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The Government, in November last year, listed brands that had to sport bar/ QR codes in order to keep out fakes

BY PT JYOTHI DATTA

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With just days to go for the Centre's deadline requiring barcodes or quick response (QR) codes on 300 medicine brands, a lion's share of the companies owning these brands are working towards meeting the August 1 deadline, say officials familiar with the development.

About 57 companies are expected to meet the Phase-I deadline, going by the activity on the ground, S. Swaminathan, Chief Executive Officer of GS1 India, a global standards organisation, told *businessline*. While about 90 per cent of the companies covered in the

first leg look set to meet the deadline, the remaining are companies that import their products.

GS1 has been set up by the Commerce Ministry, industry bodies and the Bureau of Indian Standards, to outline global standards that facilitate transfer of product information. It is an affiliate of GS1 Global.

[The Centre had in November 2022 listed 300 top brands](#), including Allegra, Augmentin, Becosules, Betadine, Calpol, Dolo, Dexorange, Electral, Gelusil, Glycomet, Mixtard, Mox, Neurobion, Thyronorm and Volini, to name a few. These brands were required to sport bar/QR codes to keep out fakes, by providing consumers information on the drugs. Medical devices are next on the cards, an industry representative said.

Outlining the benefits, Swaminathan said, companies would be able to track their products and identify and recall drugs if the supply chain was compromised. The system will also have a trail of ingredients going into the drug and the distribution chain involved in getting the drug to the consumer, he added.

The initiative comes even as allegations of contaminated cough syrup, and its possible links to deaths are reported overseas. While the Centre has been bringing out measures to ensure quality products leave Indian shores, industry-watchers sought stringent measures for products sold locally, as well.

Also read: [A week on, drugmakers grapple with QR/bar code logistics](#)

A joint study last year by GS1 and the Association of Healthcare Providers of India (AHPI) revealed, over 80 per cent of pharmaceutical and medical devices manufacturers did not have product visibility till point of care. And more than 50 per cent of them lose 1 per cent of their sales due to expiry and pilferage.

## **End in sight?**

Representatives of large and mid-sized domestic drugmakers told the correspondent they have not asked for an extension of the deadline.

Suresh Pattathil, President with the Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) said, “member companies are aligned with the August implementation for the codes and all products manufactured after August (locally manufactured and imported products)

will have QR codes.” Further, he added, to ensure seamless implementation, on certain technical aspects, they were engaging with the Government. OPPI is a platform largely for multinational companies.

Swaminathan said the landscape was changing rapidly and about 20 companies were involved in getting the hardware and software to help drugmakers meet the deadline. There are multiple business models and small and medium companies doing contract work for larger companies would get their client’s support to get up to speed with the technology, he said.

Industry observers said the cost involved would be incremental, depending on the level of automation that companies wanted. Nearly 10 years since discussions on a local track and trace system for medicines began, Swaminathan was hopeful that “there is light at the end of the tunnel”.