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Written by Gargi Verma | Raipur | Updated: May 29, 2020 7:17:32 am

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Migrant labourers walk to their home states amid the nationwide lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. (File Photo/Jasbir Malhi)

Three girls, including two infants, died over the last 48 hours in three separate quarantine centres across Chhattisgarh, with officials saying that two of the deaths were caused by asphyxiation while the children were being fed.

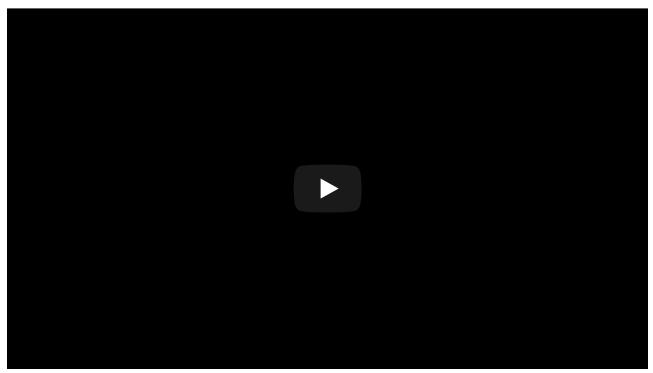
The third child, a four-month-old who died Thursday, had been ill for the last few days, and her Covid test result is awaited. The other two died on Wednesday, including an 18-month-old and three-month-old who, sources said, was "severely malnourished".

All the three were children of migrant workers who had returned to the state after the lockdown was eased.

Officials attributed the deaths to a combination of heat and overcrowding at quarantine centres. State Health Minister T S Singh Deo said "strict action" would be taken if any "lapses" were found at the centres but added that "the system is overburdened with the number of returning migrants".

Thursday's death occurred in Balod district, and officials identified the victim's father as Yuvraj Nishad, who had returned to his village, Tenga, from Chandrapur

in Maharashtra on May 14 along with his wife, three-year-old son and four-monthold daughter.



"The girl was unwell and local health workers were checking on her. On May 26, they asked the family to get the child to hospital. The family reached the hospital on May 27, but no one checked the child the entire day," Yogeshwar Nishad, Yuvraj's older brother, claimed. "My brother informed me today that the child had died."

Local officials said the parents refused to part with the body until they were assured by police officers that it would be returned to them for the last rites. Finally, a health worker in PPE carried the body out, as Yuvraj watched with his son at the door of the centre.

"The family came on a truck from Maharashtra. We had sent the child's sample on May 25, but the test results haven't come yet," said a district official.

The 18-month-old died at a quarantine centre in Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi on Wednesday, three days after she had arrived with her family from Bhopal. Officials said she died due to asphyxiation after food got stuck in her throat.

"The girl's family — her father is a 22-year-old migrant worker — had come to the centre a week ago but then slipped out and went home. After the villagers got to

Chhattisgarh: Three children die in quarantine in last 48 hours | India News, The Indian Express know, they sent them back," an official said.

The three-month-old died on the same day at a quarantine centre in Kabirdham distict's Bandhatola village. Officials said the child's family had returned from Nagpur on May 11. "The girl and her family were kept at the village school where more than 30 other people are under guarantine," an official said.

According to sources, the child was "severely malnourished" and had been admitted to the local hospital before she died due to asphyxiation while being fed milk.

The latest deaths follow a series of at least 10 fatalities in quarantine centres across the state since May 14, including one due to electrocution, two to snakebite, two suicides and at least three due to illness.

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The guarantine centres are decentralised, and monitored by the district administration. "In each village, government buildings are used as quarantine centres. These buildings are crowded and the heat has increased exponentially. This can lead to dehydration and related complications," said a health official.

"The state machinery is failing in providing food, shelter and transportation to migrant workers. These deaths are indicative of that," said activist and lawyer Priyanka Shukla from Bilaspur.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Health Minister Deo said: "The transit of migrants should have been regulated. There are limits to all systems. As of now, we have a severe backlog in testing because there are just not enough labs. We are trying to set up new labs, but that will take weeks. We are trying to help people in

quarantine centres with all facilities. In lieu of the current weather conditions, water and ORS sachets should be provided."

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