

## Centre issues guidelines to limit coronavirus spread during festival season

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**NEW DELHI** : The central government has asked states to continue with night curfews, weekend curfews and other restrictions to highlight that covid-19 is still not over and to influence adherence to COVID-appropriate behavior ahead of the festival season.

Union health ministry on Thursday issued standard operating procedure to be followed during the festival season to limit the spread of coronavirus. "We have issued detailed SOP for States/ UTs on Tuesday. Mass gatherings should be avoided in areas identified as Containment Zones and in districts reporting more than 5% case positivity. Gatherings with advance permissions and limited people (as per local context) to be allowed in districts with a positivity rate of 5% and below. Relaxations and restrictions should be imposed based on weekly case positivity," said Rajesh Bhushan, union health secretary.

In a letter written to the Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries and Health Secretaries of the states Bhushan said that covid-19 still remains a grave and continuing public health challenge in our country. While the country is witnessing a sustained decline in the number of daily cases as well as daily deaths but the second surge of Covid-19 is still not over. Globally also, the surge in cases is being reported across multiple countries. This surge in cases has reinforced the importance of implementation of Covid Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) in addition to vaccination efforts, he said.

"Amidst the rise in new cases of Covid-19 across the globe and even with the consistent decline in India's second surge, India has 3.09 lakh active cases and is still reporting daily cases as high as 30,000. Hence, there is a need for a continued focus on prompt and effective containment measures as well as Acceleration in the Pace and Coverage of Covid Vaccination to prevent any potential rise in number of cases," said Bhushan adding that this is a critical period as there may be a tendency to ignore COVID-safe behavior during festivals, resulting in large gatherings, events, fairs etc.

"It is critical to enforce adherence to guidelines to allow festivities in a cautious, safe and Covid appropriate manner. Any laxity in implementation of Covid Appropriate Behavior could lead to serious consequences and can result in a surge in cases," said Bhushan.

The central government has said that Restrictions and relaxations shall be imposed and monitored based on weekly case positivity or a high bed occupancy (Oxygen and ICU beds) and restrictions if any shall be imposed without any delay and for a minimum period of 14 days besides continued focus on the five-fold strategy of Test-Track-Treat-Vaccinate and adherence to COVID Appropriate Behaviour.

"To safely navigate through the festive season without any adverse consequences in the form of infection outbreak, it is important that States continue to diligently follow the five pillars of COVID-19 Management i.e. "Test-Track-Treat-Vaccinate and adherence to COVID Appropriate Behavior," said Bhushan.

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The central government has further asked the States to closely monitor the case trajectories across all districts on a daily basis to identify any early warning signals and to ensure imposition of restrictions and adherence to COVID Appropriate Behaviour as a non-pharmaceutical intervention to control the spread of infection.

"It is important that these guidelines are reiterated and ensured by the State Governments amongst all concerned for effective follow up in a mission mode approach to maintain the gains made so far in covid-19 management and avoid any resurgence of cases," said Bhushan.

The union health ministry data showed that 31,923 cases were reported in the last 24 hours. At least 62.73 % of the total cases in last week reported from Kerala. Weekly positivity less than 3% for 12th consecutive week. 33 Districts in India are reporting more than 10% weekly Positivity. 23 Districts in India are reporting a weekly Positivity between 5 to 10%.

"We may be witnessing a decline, but we need to continue to follow COVID Appropriate Behaviour," said Bhushan. The Active Caseload is presently 3,01,640. Active cases presently constitute 0.90% of the country's total Positive Cases. This is the lowest figure in active cases in India since March 2020, the union health ministry data showed. India has so far conducted over 55.83 Crores cumulative covid-19 tests.

The Weekly Positivity Rate at 2.11% remains less than 3% for the last 90 days now. The Daily Positivity rate reported to be 2.09%. The daily Positivity rate has remained below 3% for last 24 days and below 5% for 107 consecutive days now, the government said.