

## **Maharashtra extends timing of shops, restaurants; to reopen amusement parks from 22 Oct**

Updated: 18 Oct 2021

Further easing the Covid-19 restrictions, the Maharashtra government on Monday decided to extend the timings of restaurants and shops in the state amid a dip in the number of coronavirus cases.

After a meeting between Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and the Covid task force, the state has decided to open amusement parks from 22 October. "The amusement parks can be operated except water rides," a statement from the Chief Minister's Office said.

We are slowly relaxing the restrictions and the number of patients seems to be decreasing. We are also reopening cinemas and theatres from 22 October. There is a constant demand to extend the working hours of restaurants and shops," the statement quoted CM Thackeray as saying.

"It was also decided to allow rides (except water rides) in the open space in amusement parks," it added.

The chief minister also directed officials to prepare guidelines for extending the operational hours for restaurants and shops.

Thackeray also instructed the Public Health Department to coordinate with the Centre on the availability of vaccines for children. He also asked them to prepare a plan for inoculating children once the Centre approves it.

Although the second wave of the pandemic has subsided, the danger of a third wave is still there and it is very important to follow Covid-19 protocols like wearing masks and keeping a safe distance, the CM said.

Vasant Nagvekar, infectious disease consultant at Global Hospital at Parel in Mumbai and a member of the state's Covid-19 Task Force said, with the chief minister likely to announce relaxations for restaurants and shopkeepers, people of the city and Maharashtra must follow the social distancing norms like compulsory masking and vaccination.

Thackeray has also said that the theatres and cinema halls, which will reopen in the state from 22 October, should start with proper fire and structural safety checks.

During a meeting with office-bearers of the Cinema Owners and Exhibitors Association here, he said an appropriate solution would be worked out in coordination with the finance department to address the woes of single-screen cinema halls that are facing financial difficulties.

"Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray today said that cinemas in the state should start with proper fire and structural safety checks," the state government said.

"It was assured during the meeting that the state government would extend all possible cooperation to revive the film exhibition business," tweeted Sharad Pawar, whose party shares power in the state with the Shiv Sena and Congress.

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Thackeray had last month announced that cinema halls and drama theatres in the state can reopen from 22 October on the condition that they follow all the protocols required to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The Maharashtra government last week issued standard operating procedures (SOPs) for cinema halls, auditoriums and drama theaters, allowing them to operate at half of the total capacity. Social distancing and other Covid-19-related norms must be followed, said the guidelines.

Show times of cinema halls will have to be "staggered", and the sale of only packaged food and beverages will be allowed. Food and beverages can not be taken inside the screening auditorium.

Cinema halls in containment zones will continue to remain closed, the government had said. Cinema-goers will be required to wear masks. Sanitisers should be available inside the halls, toilets and in other places.

Spectators must have been vaccinated against Covid-19 or their health status on the Aarogya Setu app must show as safe, according to the SOPs.

The air-conditioning in cinema halls should be set at temperatures between 24 to 30 degrees Celsius and humidity levels between 40 to 70 per cent, according to the SOPs.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra reported 1,715 new Covid-19 cases on Sunday, taking the state's infection tally to 65,91,697, while 29 deaths pushed the toll to 1,39,789, the health department said.

As many as 2,680 patients recuperated during the day, which took the recovery count to 64,19,678, it said. The state's recovery rate is 97.39 per cent and the fatality rate is 2.12 per cent.

With 1,10,465 tests being conducted on Sunday, the overall test figure of the state rose to 6,10,20,463. There are 28,631 active cases in Maharashtra at present. Mumbai did not report any death due to the virus during the day, but recorded 366 new cases.

There were 706 new cases and three deaths in Mumbai division, including one in Raigad district and two in Vasai-Virar, the department said. Nashik division reported 285 new coronavirus cases, including 202 in Ahmednagar district alone.

Pune division had 528 fresh cases, Kolhapur division 116 cases, Aurangabad division 25 cases and Latur division 44 cases, it said.

Akola division reported five cases, but Akola and Amravati districts as well as the two cities did not report a single case on Sunday. The division did not report any death. Nagpur division witnessed six new cases, but not a single death.