

Mumbai, Pune lockdown may be extended till 18 May State health minister

Updated: 25 Apr 2020, 02:03 PM IST

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MUMBAI: The nationwide lockdown may be lifted on 4 May, but Mumbai and Pune are likely to extend the curbs till 18 May as covid-19 cases continue to raise in the two cities, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope told Mint on Saturday.

"The main objective of implementing the lockdown was to stop the spread of covid-19 pandemic and if the spread is not getting contained, we will have to extend the lockdown," Tope said over the phone.

"At present, the issue is only with the slums where positive cases are increasing rapidly. We have to ensure that all the containment zones are completely cordoned off. If required, we will extend the lockdown for 15 more days after 3 May only for the containment zones, if not for the entire Mumbai and Pune," he added.

There are 512 active containment zones in the state currently, while Pune sealed peth or market areas in central old Pune and Kondhwa since 7 April. This essentially means that complete lockdown will continue in all the hotspots in Pune and Mumbai, which have seen the highest number of covid-19 cases in the past month.

As of 24 April, Maharashtra reported 394 new covid-19 cases, taking the state's tally of corona virus positive cases to 6817, according to Maharashtra health department. Of these 6,817 cases, 4,447 were from Mumbai alone, followed by 1020 from the Pune division. In Mumbai's Dharavi, which is Asia's largest slum, the total covid-19 positive cases reached 220, as of 24 April, while 14 were dead.

"We have asked the government to enforce complete lockdown restrictions on schools, colleges and public gatherings across Maharashtra till May 18. For Mumbai and Pune, all non-essential services will not be allowed to operate in the hotspot areas for at least another 15 days after 3 May," said Tope.

As per the Union government's guidance, cluster containment action plan is being implemented in places where clusters of patients have been found in the state. Currently, 1,19,161 people are in home quarantine and 8,814 people are in institutional quarantine, the state said. The death toll from covid-19 has now gone up to 301 in the state.

A month after the nationwide lockdown, the Centre has allowed neighborhood shops in the residential areas to open provided they follow certain guidelines.

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The Union ministry of home affairs on Friday said, "all shops, including neighbourhood shops and standalone shops, shops in residential complexes, within the limits of municipal corporations and municipalities, registered under the the Shops and Establishment Act of the respective State and UT" are allowed to open during the lockdown.

However, shops in market places, multi-brand and single brand malls as well as market complexes located in municipality areas will remain closed till May 3.

The relaxations will not be applicable to corona virus hotspots and containment zones. Shops are allowed to remain functional only with 50% of the staff. Wearing masks and social distancing were mandatory, as per the guidelines.

The total number of corona virus cases in India has climbed to 24,506. The death toll has increased to 775. India is under a lockdown till May 3 to curb the spread of the virus which has killed nearly 197,000 worldwide. Earlier this week, the Centre eased lockdown norms in places least affected by covid-19.

On 21 April, Maharashtra government reinstated a full lockdown in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and the Pune Metropolitan Region (PMR), a day after some curbs were relaxed. The development came after the state government issued guidelines on partial lifting of the lockdown from 20 April.

"While we have allowed factories and agriculture-related businesses in both green and orange zones from 20 April in the state, and are closely monitoring that social distancing be maintained in these areas," said Tope.

Among sectors that have been allowed in the green and orange zones to resume activities are agriculture and its branches (horticulture, fisheries, plantations, animal husbandry, forest-related activities), MGNREGA work, movement of cargo, functioning of commercial and private establishments, industries operating in rural areas, manufacturing in special economic zones and industrial townships only in non-containment zones, construction of roads, buildings and all kinds of industrial projects, renewable energy projects and all urgent pre-monsoon related work.

"The lockdown will have to be carefully lifted with clear segregation between hotspot and non-hotspot areas. The essential services would need to continue with the least manpower possible to reduce covid-19 transmission and social distancing norms will have to be enforced in places where non-essential services are started. After 3 May, the government can only lift the lockdown partially and only in the green and orange zones. For Mumbai and Pune, the lockdown must continue," said Dr Pradeep Awate, state surveillance officer with the Maharashtra health department.