

Not averse to imposing stricter restrictions to contain Covid-19: Punjab CM

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Chandigarh: Amid a spike in COVID-19 infections and deaths, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Monday said he was not averse to taking harsher measures to check further spread of the virus.

Though Singh did not rule out a fresh lockdown, especially in areas witnessing a surge in cases, he made it clear that economic activities would not be allowed to suffer.

The Punjab cabinet, in a virtual meeting chaired by the chief minister, reviewed the pandemic situation in the state.

The chief minister, in response to a suggestion from Expert Health Advisory Committee chairman K K Talwar, said, if needed, the state government would consider going in for strong measures to combat the novel coronavirus.

Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who is heading the expert group for revival of the state's economy, also said any measures to check COVID-19 spread should not impact economic activities, according to a government release.

Ahluwalia also reiterated that there had been no suggestion by his panel for withdrawal of free power to farmers, as was being projected by a section of the media.

He clarified this after the chief minister said that a lot of misinformation was being spread on this count.

Ahluwalia said the group was in favour of diversification to reduce dependence on paddy, and wanted Punjab to spend 20 per cent more annually, for the next five years, on public health infrastructure.

Warning that the state must also be ready for a second spike in COVID-19 infections, the noted economist said if lockdown had to be introduced in certain areas then strict protocols should be put in place to ensure that there is no impact on industrial and income generating avenues.

The state had reached 20,000 tests per day, including rapid antigen testing, he said.

Talwar cited various researches to point out that strict adherence to wearing masks for the next four weeks could help control the pandemic.

Singh said the district and police officials had been given strict directives to enforce COVID-19 protocols such as wearing of face mask and maintaining social distancing.