

Govt issues guidelines for workplace safety as offices resume

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NEW DELHI: Workplaces must be properly disinfected before reopening in case an employee contracts covid-19, Union health ministry guidelines issued on Sunday said, adding there is no need to close or seal the premises.

"In case of one or two covid-19 cases reported in offices, the disinfection procedure will be limited to places/areas occupied and visited by the patient in past 48 hours and work can be resumed after disinfection as per protocol. If a larger number of cases are reported at the workplace, the whole block or building, as the case may be, should be disinfected," it said.

The government, however, said that offices in containment zones will remain closed except for medical and essential services, and those outside containment zones can operate. It added that meetings, as far as feasible, should be done through video conferencing.

According to the guidelines, mandatory hand hygiene and thermal screening should be ensured at the entrance and only asymptomatic staff and visitors should be allowed to enter. It said that standard and simple public health safety measures, such as maintaining a minimum distance of six feet in common places, use of face covers or masks and frequent hand washing, must be observed by all employees and visitors at all times.

The government issued the guidelines as workplaces have relatively close settings, with shared spaces like workstations, corridors, elevators and stairs, parking lots, cafeteria, canteens, meeting rooms. It warned that covid-19 can spread relatively fast among officials, staff and visitors.

India has been recording a steady decline in the number of daily new deaths since 1 October. In the last 24 hours, 92 deaths were reported. India has also seen a fall in case fatality rate, that stands at 1.43%.

India's active caseload consists of 1.26% of total positive cases at 1,37,567 on Sunday. Over 86.25% of new cases are from six states. Kerala continues to report highest daily new cases at 5,471, followed by Maharashtra (3,611), and Tamil Nadu (477), the health ministry said. Six states account for 78.3% of the new deaths with Maharashtra reporting maximum casualties at 38, followed by Kerala (16). Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh reported 5 deaths each, it said.

In an indication of the slowing pandemic, four states/UTs have not reported any new covid-19 case in the last 24 hours. While Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Ladakh, Tripura and Andaman & Nicobar Islands didn't report any fresh case, over 18 states didn't report any death due to covid-19.

Experts have said that the country is seeming to reach herd immunity. "A majority of Indian cities that were hotbeds for covid seem to be inching towards herd immunity. As we move closer, the case load is expected to come down further. However, this may not stop new centres emerging or a resurgence in these areas again after a break in time," said Himanshu Sikka, lead-health, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene, (WASH), an international healthcare development consultancy.

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“We have seen a surge in Mumbai post the start of local trains. Also, the places that have not seen a surge yet are more at risk along with those that managed the surge earlier, like we are seeing in the case of Kerala. Pandemic is not over and people need to remain wary of it,” he said.

The cumulative number of healthcare and frontline workers vaccinated against covid-19 in the country has surpassed 8.5 million. Over 68.55% of total vaccinated beneficiaries are from 10 states.