

Maharashtra lockdown extended by another 15 days beyond 30 April, says health minister

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- **Currently, the lockdown in Maharashtra is imposed till April-end amid Covid-19 surge.**
- **Earlier today, Maharashtra joined several states to announce that it would be providing free Covid-19 vaccines to all citizens in the state aged between 18-44 years.**

Amid a massive surge in both novel coronavirus cases and deaths in the state, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday said that the lockdown in Maharashtra will be extended by another 15 days beyond April 30.

The strict curbs on movement of people and a host of other activities are in force in the state since April 14 and were to end on April 30. Essential services have been exempted from the curbs.

He said all members of the cabinet, who participated in a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, pitched for such extension.

"All members of the Maharashtra Cabinet are of the opinion that current COVID-19 restrictions should be extended for the next 15 days," Tope told reporters.

Addressing media persons after a Cabinet meeting here, Tope said though the COVID-19 situation seems to have stabilised to some extent in the state, all the ministers pitched for extending the on-going curbs.

Today, the number (of daily cases) is 60,000-plus. There definitely is some stability. We had earlier predicted that (daily) cases may go beyond 70,000. But that has not happened.

Meanwhile, ahead of the next phase of the Covid-19 vaccination drive in the country, which is scheduled to begin from 1 May, 2021, the Maharashtra government joined several states to announce that it would be providing free Covid-19 vaccines to all citizens in the state aged between 18-44 years.

"Today, the cabinet under the leadership of chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has decided to provide free COVID-19 vaccination to all the citizens of Maharashtra aged between 18-44 years," stated the CMO office.

"We have all the infrastructure to conduct vaccination but we don't have vaccines in adequate quantity. The CM is talking to different vaccine manufacturers. There will be separate centres for vaccination of those between 18-44 years of age," said Tope.

In view of the alarming rise in the COVID-19 cases, the Maharashtra government on April 4 announced a weekend lockdown and restrictions on the movement of people in the night during the weekdays till April 30.

The government had also clamped other restrictions like the closure of private offices, theatres and salons to curb the unprecedented surge in the cases.

Currently, the weekend lockdown is in force from 8 pm on Fridays and last till 7 am on Mondays.

Section 144 of CrPC, prohibiting assembly of five or more people at one spot, will be in force during the period, Thackeray had said, but refrained from terming the new curbs as a lockdown.

Malls, cinema halls, gyms, other recreational spaces are shut till 1 May in order to contain the virus. Social gatherings are also prohibited state-wide.

These curbs are in addition to the weekend lockdowns and other restrictions which will remain in force till April 30 under its 'Break the Chain' COVID-19 action plan.

The state government later directed groceries, vegetable shops and dairies to remain open only for four hours, between 7 am and 11 am, and banned home delivery after 8 pm till May 1.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra on Tuesday reported the biggest single-day spike in novel coronavirus deaths since the pandemic outbreak in the country. With record 895 more virus-related fatalities recorded in last 24 hours, the death toll in the state has now reached 66,179.

Along with that, the state also reported over 66,358 new cases today, taking the tally to 44,100,85, according to the health bulletin.

In terms of vaccination, Maharashtra has inoculated over 1.53 crore people against Covid-19 so far, a health official said on Wednesday.