

Covid relaxation - Hotels, malls can stay open in Maharashtra till 10 p.m.

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Hotels, restaurants and malls can function in Maharashtra till 10 p.m. from August 15 as a part of new relaxation measures announced by the state government on Wednesday.

Entry in malls will be allowed to fully vaccinated individuals only. Cinema halls, auditoriums and places of worship will remain shut.

The state had allowed for the opening of malls in 25 districts from August 3.

While stores were allowed to function till 10 p.m., malls remained shut in Mumbai. Restaurants in Mumbai too were restricted from serving dine-in customers after 4 p.m.

Hotels and restaurant associations protested the August 3 decision forcing the government to do a rethink.

The state cabinet on Tuesday decided to relax restrictions further on the recommendations of the health task force.

However the relaxations are being introduced with certain riders. Health minister Rajesh Tope said that restaurants will be allowed to remain open with 50 per cent capacity till 10 p.m. and will have to comply with social distancing measures. Restaurants will also have to fully vaccinate their staff to remain open till 10 p.m. or could face action.

Similarly entry in malls too will be given to fully vaccinated individuals only. In Mumbai vaccinated individuals can travel in local trains too.

These relaxations will be withdrawn and lockdown reintroduced in the state if daily liquid medical oxygen requirement in Maharashtra crosses 700 metric tonnes.

Dilip Datwani, advisor of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India welcomed the move but said restaurants could still face a challenge as majority of staff have only taken a single dose.

An 84-day gap is required between two doses of Covishield vaccine and Datwani said staff would have to wait for several weeks before getting the second dose.

"There was no reason to order restaurants to close at 4 p.m. as Covid-19 cases have been declining in the state. It was a loss making proposition for hoteliers to operate with curtailed timings," he added.

Over 5,500 new Covid-19 cases were registered in the state on Tuesday and the number of active cases is over 64,000.