

## Centre takes Covid containment precautions ahead of festive season

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**NEW DELHI** : India's covid-19 curve may be plateauing, but the next three months of the festive season remain crucial as the country continues to add as many as 20,000 cases every day, the Union health ministry said on Thursday.

Citing global evidence of a surge in cases followed by unhindered public gathering in the UK, Russia and the Netherlands, government officials said the threat of a covid-19 resurgence still exists.

"For tackling any surge in cases, we have made available 8.36 lakh hospital beds for treatment of covid-19 patients. Also, there are nearly one million isolation beds in dedicated care centres," said Dr V.K. Paul, member (health), NITI Aayog. "Over 4.86 lakh oxygen-supported beds and 1.35 lakh ICU (intensive care unit) beds are available. And we are prepared to face a daily surge of 4.5-5 lakh covid-19 cases," he said.

While the number of cases is dipping, the government has urged people to continue observing covid-19 appropriate behaviour. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) update, India now ranks fifth in the highest number of new covid-19 cases last week. India's ranking has gradually improved in last one month from second to fifth with a gradual decrease in new cases. The country last week witnessed a 21% fall in fresh cases. The WHO epidemiological update said that the highest numbers of new cases were reported from the US at 760,571, the UK (239,781); Turkey (197,277), the Russian Federation (165,623); and India (161,158)—the only one to record a fall.

"Weekly case positivity has declined from 21.48% between 29th April-5th May, to 1.68% between 30th September - 6th October. While overall positivity across the country gives comfort, there are still a large number of districts reporting high case positivity," said Lav Agarwal, joint secretary, Union health ministry.

Indian government data on Thursday showed that at least 22,431 new cases were reported in the last 24 hours. Over 56% of the new cases in the last week were recorded in Kerala.

"We are focusing on controlling spread of infection in five states—Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Mizoram and Karnataka. There is a need to preserve the gains in states where the coronavirus infection is controlled and to ensure that infection spread is monitored," said Agarwal.

"While overall positivity across the country gives comfort, there are still a large number of districts reporting high case positivity. A total of 28 districts are reporting a weekly positivity of 5 to 10%. We need to be cautious and undertake required precautions for upcoming festivals and need to celebrate upcoming festivals and events in the spirit of winning over the evil of covid-19," he said.

The government said that people should watch out for October, November and December and try to celebrate festivals online instead of physical gatherings.

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“This time people should avoid unnecessary travel, stay home and celebrate festivals virtually. Online modes of shopping should also be explored,” said Agarwal.