

## Centre releases fresh Covid guidelines to mitigate rise in cases amid festivals

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The Centre on Saturday released new Covid guidelines to contain the possible spread of virus during festivals. It said that unregulated public movement without duly following Covid appropriate behavior, especially in context of festivities have often led to upsurge in Covid cases. "This is why it remains crucial for all of us not to let our guards down against Covid in view of upcoming festive season," Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said in a letter to States and UTs.

All States/UTs have been advised to take following precautions in view of upcoming festivities:

- Strict enforcement of laid down guidelines for allowing festivities in a cautious, safe and Covid appropriate manner.
- No mass gathering should be allowed in areas identified as containment zones and in districts reporting more than 5% Covid test confirmation rates.
- Necessary directions should be issued adequately in advance by the concerned State Governments for practicing cautions during the festivities.
- Gatherings that are allowed with advance permission and limited number of people (as per local context) should be closely monitored and in case of violations of COVID appropriate behavior necessary enforcement and penal actions should be taken.
- There should be strict adherence to limits on public gatherings taking into account availability of space to ensure effective physical distancing.
- Guidelines already issued with respect to malls, local markets and places of worship, as made available on MoHFW website dated 30th November 2020 and 1st March 2021 should be strictly followed.
- States/UTs need to continue diligent focus on five pillars of Covid management i.e. Test-Track-Treat-Vaccinate and COVID appropriate behaviour.
- States/UTs may explore and promote various modalities for online modes of celebrations, online shopping and discourage unnecessary travel.

The Centre said it is crucial that district health authorities keep a strict watch over local trajectory of cases and institute timely and rigorous interventions based on the advisories issued by the health ministry and Home ministry from time to time.

"States/UTs are further requested to ensure that non-adherence to COVID Appropriate behavior in public places is dealt with strongly. Inter-sectoral collaboration between health departments, law enforcement agencies, market and trade associations, civil society organizations, and community will be essential to curb any risk of a spike in COVID-19 trajectory," Bhushan said.