

Enforce strict Covid-appropriate behaviour - Centre tells Assam, West Bengal amid surge in Cases

Updated: 30 Oct 2021, 04:23 PM IST

With the number of Covid cases and weekly positivity rates rising in West Bengal and Assam, the Centre directed the two states to enforce strict Covid-appropriate behaviour. It also asked them to review the situation.

In Assam, Barpeta and Kamrup Metro, and in West Bengal, Kolkata and Howrah -- have been identified as districts of concern due to high quantum of cases and positivity.

Arti Ahuja, additional Secretary in the Union Health Ministry, wrote to the chief secretary of the states highlighting the increase in weekly new Covid cases since the past week (October 20-26) and early signs of rise in positivity since the last four weeks till October 25.

She pointed out, in Assam, there has been a 41% increase in weekly new cases since the past week (October 20-26) and that there have been early signs of rise in positivity since last four weeks from 1.89% in the week of September 28-October 4 to 2.22% in the week of October 19-25.

"The state has also witnessed a decline in tests conducted from 1,64,071 in the week of September 28-October 4 to 1,27,048 in the week of October 19-25. Because of the rising positivity, the state needs to conduct enhanced testing while maintaining the required RT-PCR share as it will aid in early identification of infection in the state," she said.

Meanwhile, in her letter to the West Bengal government, Ahuja pointed out that the state has shown approximately 41% rise in weekly new cases since the past week, 6,040 cases in the week of October 20-26 compared to 4,277 cases in the week of October 13-19 and that there have been early signs of increase in positivity since the past four weeks from 1.93% in the week of September 28-October 4 to 2.39% during October 19-25.

West Bengal has also witnessed a decline in the tests conducted from 2,62,319 during September 28-October 4 to 2,61,515 in the week of October 19-25.

It has been observed that Covid cases surge exponentially where basic public health strategy (testing, tracking, treatment, Covid-appropriate behaviour and vaccination) is not followed rigorously, she said in the letter.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan had written to West Bengal government last week expressing concerns over the rise in Covid cases in Kolkata following Durga Puja celebrations.

Centre asked Assam and West Bengal to follow these steps:

Ahuja has stressed on monitoring of cases by proper implementation of containment-zones, increased focus on house-to-house search for active Covid cases within these zones, strict and daily monitoring of cases under home isolation and their referral to hospitals and strengthening contact tracing of COVID-19 positive people and review of containment zones in Assam and West Bengal.

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Besides, there should be a detailed district-wise and facility-wise analysis of deaths, which include review of number of fatalities that take place within 24 and 72 hours of admission to hospitals to resolve problems related with late hospital admission and the need for monitoring treatment practices.

The letter also underlines strengthening the system for early and smooth admission of cases along with a real-time public dashboard highlighting the available hospital or bed infrastructure, strict adherence to National Treatment Protocols, augmenting ICUs, oxygen beds and ventilator capacity in the state and ramping up testing figures, while maintaining the share of RT-PCR tests.

Aim for 100 per cent first dose coverage of 18-plus population along with increasing the pace of the second dose of vaccination for eligible population, the letter stated.

As far as super spreader events and places are concerned, there should be strict surveillance and monitoring as per standard operating protocols (SOPs) of the health ministry and testing as per the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines, besides ensuring Covid-appropriate behaviour: Mask-wearing and physical distancing must be strictly enforced.

Also, it called for timely updating of the district-level data related to new cases, deaths, hospitalisation status, in hotspots in the Covid India portal and routine submission of RT-PCR positive samples from international travellers as well as from community for genomic analysis at the designated Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) network laboratory as per laid down protocols.