

Maharashtra to re-impose COVID restrictions? What health minister says amid Omicron fears

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Even as Maharashtra reports 10 Omicron Covid variant cases, Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday assured that there is no need to panic as severity of the new strain is low. Further, ruling out possibilities of Covid-restrictions as of now, Tope said, earlier this week, such measures will be taken only after seeking the Centre's guidance and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's views.

"There is a total of 10 Omicron cases in Maharashtra till today. About 65 swabs have been sent for genome sequencing, their reports are awaited. Screenings are being conducted at International airports," Tope told reporters on Wednesday.

"The Omicron variant is spread over 54 countries so far. Transmissibility is higher. But, the severity or virulence is low. So we do not need to panic."

On how the state is planning to control the surge of the virus, he said, "We are working with the 3T Principle - tracking, tracing and testing. For genome sequence, we have currently three labs. We will expand the facility further in Nagpur and Aurangabad."

No Covid-restrictions as of now

Earlier this week, the health ministers asserted the state is currently closely monitoring the situation and decision on issuing fresh COVID curb will be taken seeking the Centre's guidance and CM's view.

"It will be too inconvenient for the people if restrictions are imposed on the activities currently allowed. Hence, we will keep a tab on the situation and take a call (on curbs) following the guidance of the Centre and the (state COVID-19) task force and based on the views of the chief minister," he said.

The minister said the state government is focusing on vaccinating people while facing the situation caused by Omicron, a new coronavirus variant which is causing worries all over the world.

"Rallies, marriages and political meetings are being held on a big scale. If COVID-19-appropriate behaviour is not observed there properly, then it leads to the possibility of spread of the infection. "And Omicron can spread fast and hence, I think it is the need of the hour to implement the rules strictly," he added.

Meanwhile, India reported nearly two dozen Omicron cases so far. Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan on Wednesday asked all the States to submit all the samples of positive cases of international travellers and their contacts as well as from emerging hotspots.

(With inputs from agencies)