

## **Delhi-Religious places to remain open on Christmas, New Year's Eve, says DDMA**

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- **Restaurants and bars will continue to operate with up to 50% of the seating capacity. Marriage-related gatherings are permitted with a maximum of 200 people in attendance.**

**NEW DELHI:** Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on Thursday said that all religious places will remain open on Christmas and New Year's Eve in Delhi.

Move aims to smoothen the process of celebrations and prayers subject to strict compliance of Covid-19-appropriate behaviour.

On Wednesday, the authorities had banned all kinds of gathering on Christmas and New Year's Eve keeping in mind the worrying surge in Omicron cases in the national capital.

"Various communications are being received seeking clarifications about the status of permission for celebrating Christmas festival and New Year's Eve in the territory of Delhi in view of the DDMA order as well as instructions issued (on Wednesday)," the authority said in an order.

"On this issue, it is to clarify that as per ... DDMA order no. 492 dated December 15, all religious places (temples, mosques, churches, gurdwaras, etc.) are already permitted to open for visitors/devotees to offer prayers/devotion /celebrations within such places subject to strict compliance of related SoPs" and adherence of COVID-19-appropriate behaviour, it said.

Amid a rise in coronavirus cases and the threat of the new variant of concern, Omicron, the DDMA had Wednesday directed district magistrates to ensure no Christmas and New Year gathering takes place in the national capital.

However, restaurants and bars will continue to operate with up to 50 per cent of the seating capacity. Marriage-related gatherings are permitted with a maximum of 200 people in attendance.

The DDMA also directed the district magistrates (DMs) to identify potential Covid-19 superspreader areas ahead of Christmas and New Year.

"All social/political/cultural/religious/festival related gatherings are prohibited throughout NCT of Delhi... All district magistrates and DCPs shall ensure that no cultural event/gatherings/congregation takes place for celebrating Christmas or New Year in the NCT of Delhi," the DDMA order stated.

The national capital logged 125 cases on Wednesday, the highest since June 22, when it had reported 134 cases of the infection.

The district magistrates and deputy commissioners of police have also been directed to tighten the enforcement machinery to ensure people follow social-distancing norms and wear masks.

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According to the Union Health Ministry, Delhi has logged 64 cases of Omicron so far, of which 23 have been discharged. According to officials, most of the Omicron patients are fully vaccinated and have mild symptoms.