

## Kerala likely to announce more curbs on Thursday as Covid cases surge

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- There is a surge in the number of coronavirus cases in the state which reported over 28,400 new infections

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** The Kerala government on Tuesday decided to strictly implement the Covid-19 health protocols as there is a surge in the number of coronavirus cases in the state which reported over 28,400 new infections.

Kerala which had recorded 2,435 new positive cases on January 1 witnessed a steady rise in the number of cases.

The daily cases increased to 5,296 on January 7. On January 12 the daily infection rate went up to 12,742 and the state reported 22,946 fresh infections on January 17.

The state government has informed that a decision on restrictions including the closure of colleges and offices and curbs on people traveling in public transport among other matters will be discussed and decided in the COVID-19 evaluation meeting to be held on Thursday.

The chief minister, who is abroad for the purpose of treatment, will chair the meeting online, government sources said. The functioning of the state secretariat here has been partially affected as a few ministers' offices have been shut due to the spread of infection among the staff.

State General Education Minister V Sivankutty, former minister and Kazhakootam MLA Kadakampally Surendran tested positive. Sources in the police department said at least 650 members of the police force are down with the infection, mostly those who returned after Sabarimala temple duty.

The KSRTC also has many of its staff down with COVID-19 affecting a few services. Police officers of at least eight police stations in Thiruvananthapuram city and rural, including Circle Inspectors and DySPs have been found infected.

As many as 24 security staff of the famed Padmanabha Swamy temple have also been tested positive. As per today's health bulletin, 215 health workers are also among the infected. Including doctors, 17 health workers tested positive and one nursing officer lost her life.

P S Saritha (44), a nursing officer from Varkala was tested positive yesterday but lost her life today, the health minister's office said.

State capital Thiruvananthapuram has recorded 48 per cent of Test Positivity Rate (TPR) which means one in two persons tested here turns positive, says state Transport Minister Antony Raju, after an evaluation meeting. "There are nearly 7,000 cases here. The TPR is at around 48 per cent, that means one in two persons tested turns positive. This is a very serious matter and the guidelines issued by the District administration needs to be implemented strictly. Stern action will be taken against the violators," Minister said.

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The evaluation meeting was held to discuss the situation in the state capital. He said the number of people allowed for weddings is 50 and there are incidents in which more number of people are participating.

Higher Education Minister R Bindu said the government was considering a move to close down colleges and shift to online classes due to the worsening Covid-19 situation.

"The college authorities have been asked to close down the college for 15 days in case a cluster is formed there," the minister said in a statement.

There are 1,42,512 active Covid-19 cases and the state capital has the most number of cases--36,250, followed by Ernakulam with 21,612 cases and Kozhikode and Thrissur districts with 14,408 and 14,407 cases respectively.

Meanwhile, the state police informed that 344 cases were registered in the state on Tuesday for violating Covid-19 health protocols. Cases were registered against 3,681 people for not wearing masks.

Meanwhile, the opposition Congress on Tuesday lashed out at the Left government saying there are more Covid-19 cases than the official numbers. Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan said currently the infection is spreading at a faster pace than that of the first and the second wave.

"The health department is standing still during this pandemic. The government has disbanded the COVID brigade. Other than a warning from the health minister that Covid-19 will spread faster in two weeks, the government has not taken any step to mitigate that," Satheesan alleged.

The health department has decided to reopen the COVID-19 First Line Treatment Centres (CFLTCs) in the regions where clusters have been formed. The state government had earlier informed that the students of class 1 to 9 will have online classes from January 21, after considering the worsening Covid-19 situation.