

Maharashtra- Covid-19 curbs likely to be relaxed further in March, says Tope

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The existing Covid-19 curbs in Maharashtra may be relaxed further in March as daily new cases continue to show a declining trend, said state health minister Rajesh Tope on Monday.

However, he informed that mask mandate and social distancing norms will continue to remain in place.

"I expect further relaxation in restrictions next month. The chief minister will take a decision on this," he said, adding that the state task force on Covid-19 is in favour of easing more curbs.

"Use of face masks, hand sanitiser and social distancing should continue in a big country like ours. We cannot stop such measures immediately in the pandemic," the minister said.

Citing a recent letter by the central government advising states to amend additional Covid-19 restrictions, Tope said the state cabinet will take a call on easing curbs soon.

"The Centre is pushing for relaxation in restrictions and the task force has also agreed for it. We will put a proposal in the cabinet meeting requesting for easing of restrictions and I hope the CM will take a positive decision. There is, however, no question of giving relaxation on mask usage," Tope reiterated.

The restrictions were tightened in the state after the third wave of coronavirus broke out in late December due to the highly contagious Omicron variant.

The state government had earlier this month relaxed Covid-19 restrictions in those districts where the vaccination coverage is over 90% single-dose and 70% double dose for people aged 18 years or above.

In the recent order, the government had allowed spas and salons to function with 50% capacity, and beaches, gardens and parks could stay open as per timings fixed by the local authorities.

The Maharashtra schools for classes 1 to 12 were reopened from 24 January in compliance with Covid-19 protocols.

Centre's letter for easing Covid curbs

The central government had last week asked states to review and alter the additional Covid-19 restrictions that were imposed after a sudden surge in infections.

"In view of the high Covid case trajectory, certain states had imposed additional restrictions at their borders and at airports. However, while effectively managing the public health challenge of Covid-19, it is equally important that movement of people and activities should not be hampered by additional restrictions," wrote Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan in a letter to states.

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“Presently, as the case trajectory across the nation are showing a sustained downward trend, it will be useful if states/UTs review and amend/do away with the additional restrictions so imposed after considering the trend of new cases, active cases and positivity,” he added.