

Maharashtra to lift all Covid curbs from Apr 2, mask won't be compulsory

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After more than two years, all pandemic-related restrictions including the mandatory wearing of masks will be lifted in Maharashtra from April 2, the Maharashtra government announced on Thursday.

'Gudhi Padwa', the Marathi New Year, falls on April 2 this year.

The decision to lift all the restrictions was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Health Minister Rajesh Tope told reporters here.

From Gudhi Padwa, all COVID-19 related restrictions under the Epidemic Diseases Act and Disaster Management Act will be withdrawn, Tope said, adding that wearing masks would be voluntary.

In a separate statement, chief minister Thackeray cautioned that though the restrictions are going to be lifted, it is advisable to maintain social distancing, wear mask and take anti-coronavirus vaccines.

Tope told reporters that the US, UK and many countries in Europe have lifted restrictions related to mandatory masks. In Maharashtra, it has been made voluntary, he said.

To a question whether the state government was taking a risk by lifting the mask mandate, the health minister said, The chief minister and others (cabinet colleagues) have consulted the State Task Force on COVID-19 and the health department before taking this decision.

Notably, on Wednesday Tope had said that looking at the rise in coronavirus cases in many countries it would not be right to take the risk of doing away with the mask mandate in Maharashtra.

The state government has already eased restrictions on movement and gathering as new cases started declining after the third wave, driven by the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV2, abated by the end of January.

With the lifting of norms, Gudhi Padwa processions can take place without any restrictions this year, Tope said.

According to the health ministry data, India has recorded a total of 4,24,89,004 coronavirus cases so far, of which Maharashtra, a state with a high urban density, saw 77,25,120, the highest in the country.

After Maharashtra, West Bengal too announced the withdrawal of COVID-19 related restrictions on Thursday.

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