

## Keep wearing masks because...: Delhi doctors amid fears of new COVID variants

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- Hours after the Delhi government withdrew the ₹500 fine for not wearing masks, experts suggested that people should continue wearing them, especially those in the vulnerable category like pregnant women and the elderly. This comes amid the fears of new variants of COVID-19, even though the new infections are on the lower side.

"It is a festive season and people will get together, socialise at workplace and at homes. Though the fine for not wearing masks has been lifted, I would still say.

That people should wear them in open and crowded places, during meetings in enclosed rooms, if not at home. More than laws, we need self-discipline, as we have all learned a lot in these two years," Dr Suranjit Chatterjee, senior consultant, internal medicine, Apollo Hospital told PTI.

Apart from COVID, masks can give you protection against pollution around this time. Chatterjee at Apollo Hospital said a person not wearing a mask is also at risk of contracting many other respiratory infections if standing next to a person who has any of these infections. So a mask helps, he said,

Adding to that, Dr Richa Sareen, consultant of pulmonology at Fortis Hospital said, "We have to be cautious since a new variant is being reported. People who are vulnerable to such infection such as pregnant women and the elderly should continue to wear masks in public places, fine or no fine".

"Also, we all need to be extra cautious because a new variant of COVID-19 is being reported, which is very transmissible. Though cases in Delhi are on the lower side, the fine for not wearing a mask in public places being lifted should not push us into a zone of false sense of security that 'everything is fine'. Having said that, we should not panic either," she said.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in a meeting last month had decided to stop levying the penalty after September 30 amid a decline in COVID-19 cases.

The authority in its meeting on September 22 noted that the positivity rate of the COVID-19 infection has come down substantially and majority of the population has been vaccinated.

Delhi recorded 107 fresh COVID-19 cases with a positivity rate of 1.64 per cent on Wednesday, according to health department data. On Tuesday, the positivity rate was 2.04 per cent, 3.61 per cent on Monday, 1.59 per cent on Sunday, 2.12 per cent on Saturday and 1.75 per cent on Friday.