

General Guidelines for Puja and upcoming Festivals, 2021

Assam could effectively manage the COVID-19 pandemic with very high recovery rate with less mortality rate. However, with the fresh spike of COVID-19 cases in few states of the country, Assam has also geared up its COVID management strategies and has been taking different need-based appropriate steps to contain the spread of COVID-19, keeping the core principle of COVID-19 management at the centre, which are namely **TESTING, TRACING and TREATING (3Ts)** along with **rapid completion of Vaccination** for the eligible categories.

In line with various Government of India guidelines, it is decided to formulate norms of public gathering during the forthcoming major festivals in the State such as Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Dipavali etc. in order to ensure that people are able to celebrate these festivals with joy and gusto, while at the same time adhering to extant COVID-19 protocols .

Government of Assam hereby notifies the following guidelines, which are to be strictly adhered followed by all the event organizers /visitors/participants of the proposed festivals:

1. Permission of organizing Durga Puja, Kali Puja, etc:

- a. The district administration must call a meeting of regular Puja committees/organizers for a detailed briefing as per the protocol/guidelines issued by the government well in advance and ensure their compliance before giving permission.
- b. The event organizers shall seek permission from the District Administration of the concerned district for organizing any event resulting in public gathering, mentioning the number of people likely to gather at the proposed event.
- c. This will enable District Administration to extend all possible support to the event organizers for successful and safe celebration of the event.

2. Spacious open event area with separate entry and exit:

- a. The event spot should be spacious and must be kept open from all sides.



- b. The event area must have adequate space for arrangement of physical distancing (as per COVID-19 protocol).
- c. Entry and exit gates must be separate.
- d. Organizers must take measures to avoid crowding at all cost.
- e. Proper signages must be there from entry to exit so that visitors are guided to adhere to COVID appropriate behaviour once s/he enters the event area.
- f. The organizers must engage volunteers at different points inside the event area to help out visitors.

3. Testing and Vaccination of Organizers, volunteers and devotees:

- a. As COVID Vaccination has attained adequate momentum and vaccines are freely available in every district and health block, **all organizers and Volunteers must be at least vaccinated with one dose of vaccine and preferably with two doses of vaccination.**
- b. The District administration while giving permission for Puja pandal shall randomly check for vaccination status of the Organizers and the list of potential volunteers to be shared by the organizers at the time of application for permission and shall give permission only on satisfactory observation of the concerned persons being adequately vaccinated.
- c. *All the Volunteers, priests and Puja Organizers must get mandatorily tested for COVID-19 before Puja starts (on Panchami day) and after immersion (Ekadasi day), even though they may be vaccinated.*
- d. The Devotees attending the events shall be allowed only after ensuring that they are having at least one dose of vaccination (exceptions allowed for those below 18 years).
- e. In order to ensure this, sufficient trained volunteers shall be put at the entry points by the organizers and the same will be supervised by the squads formed by the District administration.
- f. In case a person with suspected symptoms is detected in a Puja Pandal, the matter should be immediately informed to District Administration and person concerned should be shifted to a Covid testing facility. Adequate sanitization measures should be undertaken to ensure safety of all concerned.

4. Guidelines for inside Puja Pandal and keeping adequate volunteers:

- a. Puja Committee must keep adequate number of vaccinated volunteers inside and outside the pandal to ensure that visitors maintain physical distancing, wear mask properly and sanitize hands while visiting pandal.



- b. Volunteers themselves also should sanitize their hands, wear mask/face shield properly and should maintain physical distancing while interacting with visitors.
- c. Keeping in view the COVID protocol, all gathering (*in the form of Anjali, prasad distribution, sandhyaarati*etc) should be done very carefully adhering to COVID norms and in small groups and in a staggered manner.
- d. Devotees should be encouraged to bring flowers from home to avoid congestion at the flower distribution and collection point during offering of Anjali.
- e. Packet distribution of prasad if done by management , must be strictly following protocol without crowding.
- f. Volunteers and police staff on duty must ensure continuous movement of people to avoid crowding near all event spots.

5. Compulsory use of mask and hand sanitizer:

- a. Use of mask properly is mandatory for all visitors/organizers visiting the event spot.
- b. To meet any exigency, organizers will have to arrange provision of getting masks by any visitor, who inadvertently comes to the event without wearing mask.
- c. Similarly, provision of hand sanitizers must be kept at the entry gate and even in nearby areas.
- d. The event spot must be sanitized twice (once before the crowd gathers and once crowd leaves the venue) and in nearby areas as a strict public health measure.

6. Movement of devotees during Puja days:

- a. Curfew hours as prescribed by ASDMA shall be strictly adhered to.
- b. It is suggested that as per the **latest time as allowed by ASDMA**, all the puja pandals must be closed for the devotees and District administration along with puja committees have to ensure this strictly;
- c. Pillion riding may be allowed during puja for a female or child below 15 years;

7. Organizing cultural program before, during and after puja days:

- a. Organizing cultural nights before, during and after puja days is strictly prohibited as per the guidelines of ASDMA SOP for public gathering.
- b. No Mela/Fair etc shall be organized by the puja committees.



- c. Road side shops near Puja Pandals shall be allowed by District administrations strictly as per availability of space following COVID restrictions and no shops shall be allowed without prior permission of the district administration/ASDMA.
- 8. Emphasis on print, electronic and Social Media:**
- a. The use of print, electronic and social media must be optimal to generate mass awareness about the COVID Vaccination and COVID-19 protocols during Durga Puja and to request devotees to follow the norms strictly to avoid any unnecessary crowding near, inside the pandal.
- b. All measures should be taken to avoid unnecessary rumours, misinformation campaign about COVID-19 and other issues during Puja time.
- 9. Low profile inauguration of Pandal and immersion of idol:**
- a. The inauguration of Puja Pandal and immersion of Durga idol should be a low-key affair with minimum people and adhering to all COVID norms.
- b. Organizers may explore the possibility of inaugurating the Puja Pandal in virtual mode, which is the safest way.
- c. Size of Puja idols shall be limited in such a way that carrying the idols shall require minimal number of people as allowed by ASDMA.
- d. Before immersion, Ghat has to be sanitized and Durga idol should straight be taken at the ghat without any stoppage on the way to avoid any unnecessary crowding.
- e. Immersion must be planned by the district administration in a staggered manner by allotting specific time to each of the Puja committee for immersion. Depending up on the number of Puja Pandals, the district administration may allot time slot to each puja committee for immersion over two days of time.
- f. If necessary, the immersion process might take extra days to complete the process adhering to COVID-19 norms.
- g. **Maximum number of persons allowed as per ASDMA guidelines only may be allowed to gather.**
- h. The volunteers and laborers engaged at Immersion ghats must be adequately vaccinated.
- 10.Emphasis on Print, Electronic and Social Media:**
- a. The use of print, electronic and social media must be optimally done to generate mass awareness about the COVID-19 protocols and need of vaccination for organizing/attending the events.



- b. Posters and signages must be put up for encouraging people to get vaccinated and for following COVID Appropriate Behaviour.
- c. "Entry with at least one dose of Vaccination only" signages must be put at all entry points and local miking should be given at regular intervals by the Puja committees to ensure that the devotees are also vaccinated properly.

The District Administration and Police Department will extend all necessary support, as and when needed, but to avail the services, event organizers have to inform the district control room detailing the space availability, number of volunteers, their vaccination status and assurance that all COVID appropriate protocols shall be adhered to.



(Anurag Goel IAS)

Principal Secretary to the Government of Assam
Health & Family Welfare Department

Memo No: HLA 264/2020/55-A

Dated Dispur, the 15th September 2021

Copy to:

1. Chief Secretary, Assam.
2. Director General of Police, Assam.
3. Principal Secretary to Hon'ble Chief Minister, Assam.
4. Chief Executive Officer, Assam State Disaster Management Authority.
5. Mission Director, National Health Mission, Assam.
6. All Deputy Commissioners for necessary action.
7. All Superintendents of Police for necessary action.
8. Director of Medical Education, Assam
9. Director of Health Services, Assam.
10. All Principals/ Superintendents, Medical College Hospital.
11. All Joint Directors of Health Services for necessary action.
12. P.P.S to Hon'ble Chief Minister for kind appraisal of Hon'ble Chief Minister.
13. P.S to Hon'ble Health Minister for kind appraisal of Hon'ble Health Minister.
14. Any other concerned.

By order etc.



Joint Secretary to the Government of Assam
Health & Family Welfare Department