

7th June 2020

POST LOCKDOWN ADVISORY FOR CHURCHES, CHAPELS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Places of worship have been shut for the past two and a half months, in observance of the COVID-19 induced lockdown. However, the Government of India had issued a Notification on 30th May 2020 on easing of restrictions for religious places along with other public places. Hence religious institutions now can open on 8th June 2020 for disinfecting the place and they can start functioning from 9th June 2020.

In accordance with the Centre's guidelines, many state governments have also decided to ease the lockdown curbs and to allow the functioning of places of worship from 9th June 2020. Temples, Mosques, Gurudwaras, Churches etc. will open in some states with restricted number of worshippers in states like Delhi, West Bengal, Kerala and many other states. Similarly, many states like Tamil Nadu and Odisha have still restrictions in place for opening of place of worship.

This advisory from Evangelical Fellowship of India, has been compiled for the benefit of Churches, Chapels and Fellowships in States where the State Government has permitted the opening of the places of worships. Please check if the State Government of your respective state has allowed the opening of places of worship or not.

General Guidelines

1. Only “asymptomatic” (who are not having signs & symptoms of fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, sore throat) members and worshippers above the age of 10 years and below the age of 65 years may be allowed to take part in the Church worship service.
2. Persons above 65 years of age, persons with comorbidities, pregnant woman and children below the age of 10 years are advised to stay at home.
3. It is recommended that the Church service be broadcasted online as well using the various social media tools for the benefit of the members who cannot congregate for the worship service because of various reasons.
4. It is recommended to cancel all revival meetings and large assemblies till the crisis of COVID-19 is over. Revival meetings and large assemblies can be organized using social media and conferencing tools.
5. Masks should be made mandatory for all worshippers and members joining in the worship service.

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6. All Ministers including the Presbyters, Priests, Pastors, Elders, Deacons and Evangelists who will take part in the worship service should be provided with Masks and Gloves.
7. It is recommended that, if they can, Churches should purchase “Thermal Infrared Thermometer” for recording the temperature at the entry point for all worshippers. If the state government makes it mandatory to record temperature of all worshippers, then the Churches must procure “Thermal Infrared Thermometer” for recording the temperature for all worshippers.
8. Individuals must maintain a minimum distance of 6 feet in public places, as far as feasible, or as prescribed by the State Government from time to time.
9. A Disinfectant Tunnel can be used at the entry point for sanitising the worshippers.
10. Alcohol based sanitisers with at least 70% alcohol can also be used for sanitising the members and worshippers at the entry and exit points.
11. Hand washing with soap (for at least 40-60 seconds) even when hands are not visibly dirty must be encouraged and the toilets of the Church premises must be equipped with proper facilities. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers must be kept accessible at convenient areas in the Church premises and all people attending should be encouraged to sanitise their hands for at least 20 seconds, using the same.
12. Respiratory etiquettes must be strictly followed. This involves strict practice of covering one’s mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue/handkerchief/flexed elbow and disposing off used tissues properly.
13. Spitting should be strictly prohibited.
14. Staggering of visitors to be done, if possible.
15. It is advised to conduct Church Service in small groups and in shifts to avoid overcrowding. This will also help every believer to choose different shifts suitable to him/her.
16. Seating arrangement must be made in such a way that adequate social distancing is maintained. Care must be taken in the arrangement of chairs, benches etc. in the Churches keeping in mind the social distance directives as per notification of the State Government.
17. Use of an LCD projector / OHP Projector for singing of Hymns / Songs and for responsive readings is recommended. Please avoid the use of Church’s Hymn / Song Books.
18. In view of potential threat of spread of infection, as far as feasible, recorded devotional music / songs may be played. Choirs or singing groups should not be allowed till situation improves.
19. If it can be done, separate entry and exits for visitors shall be preferable and must be organized.
20. Shoes / footwear should be preferably taken off inside own vehicle. If needed they should be kept in separate slots for each individual / family by the persons themselves.

21. Installation & use of Aarogya Setu App has been recommended by the Government of India but is not mandatory.
22. If any worshipper or a member of the church is having any symptoms of illness consistent with COVID-19 (e.g. onset of cough OR shortness of breath OR at least two of the following symptoms: fever, chills, muscle ache, headache, sore throat), he / she must not be permitted to attend the Church Service. They shall be advised to consult the Doctor to get medical attention and check-up.
23. Hospitals/clinics in the nearby areas, which are available for COVID -19 treatment, should be identified and this information should be displayed at a conspicuous place in the Church premises, where it would be visible to all Members / Worshipers at all the times.
24. In case of a suspected or confirmed case in the premises:
 - a. Place the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others.
 - b. Provide a mask/face cover till such time he/she is examined by a doctor.
 - c. Immediately inform the nearest medical facility (hospital/clinic) or call the state or district helpline.
 - d. A risk assessment will be undertaken by the designated public health authority (district RRT / treating physician) and accordingly further action be initiated regarding management of case, his/her contacts and need for disinfection.
 - e. Disinfection of the premises to be taken up if the person is found positive.

Eucharist / Holy Communion / Lord's Table

1. The Minister / Assistant must sanitise his hands before preparing the Eucharist / Holy Communion / Lord's Table. Churches can conduct Eucharist /Holy Communion/ Lord's service, if there are no restrictions in place by the order of the respective state governments. In many states the distribution of Prasad has been prohibited and since there are no clear instructions at the moment concerning the Eucharist / Holy Communion / Lord's Table, it must be assumed that the restrictions in those states that apply on the distribution of Prasad also applies to the Eucharist / Holy Communion / Lord's Table.
2. Before the sacramental wafers / bread are unpacked and kept in trays / plates and the sacramental wine / syrup is poured in the Chalice /Cups, hands must be properly sanitised with a sanitiser made up of isopropyl alcohol or ethanol. The Priest /Presbyter/ Pastor / Ordained Minister administering bread shall wear gloves duly sanitised and a mask and a face visor. Bread must be administered by Pastor / anyone person and worshipers must not be allowed to take it directly from the tray. Wine shall be administered in individual cups. Wine cups and Plates must be sanitised before and after usage. Collection of wine cups after partaking must be done with wide open trays and by a person wearing gloves and mask.

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The Church Premises / Venue

1. Effective sanitation within the premises must be maintained with particular focus on lavatories, hand and foot-washing stations/areas.
2. Posters/standees on preventive measures about COVID-19 may be displayed prominently. Audio and Video clips to spread awareness on preventive measures for COVID-19 should also be regularly played if possible.
3. For air-conditioning/ventilation, the guidelines of CPWD shall be followed which inter alia emphasises that the temperature setting of all air conditioning devices should be in the range of 24-30°C, and relative humidity should be in the range of 40 - 70%. Intake of fresh air should be as much as possible and cross ventilation should be adequate.
4. Proper crowd management in the parking lots and outside the premises – duly following social distancing norms must be organized.
5. Any shops, stalls, cafeteria etc., outside and within the premises should also follow social distancing norms at all times.
6. Specific markings may be made with enough distance between them so that the queues are manageable and social distancing is ensured within the premises.
7. The cleaning staff / volunteers of the Churches must wear masks, disposable gloves and cap / hair protection at all times. They should not touch their face while cleaning and must wash hands with disinfectant after the cleaning work is over. Cleaning staff must change their masks and dispose their gloves at the end of their shift or the Church Service. It may be helpful for them to keep a change of clothes at work.
8. The cleaning staff should thoroughly wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after gloves are removed.
9. Care must be taken to clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces, focusing on areas where people are known to have been and items they may have touched (e.g., benches, chairs and any shared equipment). Clean and disinfect / sanitised the touched surfaces and objects such as: Doorknobs and handles, Stair rails, Classroom desks and chairs, tables and chairs, Handrails, Light switches, shared remote controls, Handrails etc.
10. Clothing worn while cleaning should be placed in a plastic bag until it can be laundered. Laundering should be done as soon as possible and done safely.
11. Use soap and water or another detergent to clean the floor, furniture of the church and lavatories. After that a disinfectant may also be used. Use a known household disinfectant brand and follow the manufacturer's instructions to ensure safe and effective use of the product. Please check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Follow manufacturer's instructions for

- application and proper ventilation. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Leave solution on a surface for at least 1 minute.
12. To properly disinfect prepare a handmade bleach solution by mixing approximately 35- 50 gram of Bleaching Powder in 3.8 litres of water to prepare a bleach solution. Make only enough diluted bleach solution that can be used in 24 hours. After that, the solution may not be effective. This may be cheaper and very effective.

Note:

The State governments, in addition to Disaster Management Act, have been using the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, Regulation and Guidelines to control the spread of COVID-19 to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which needs to be followed in letter and spirit. If disobedience to executive orders causes or tends to cause danger to human life, health or safety, or causes or tends to cause a riot or affray, *the person(s) responsible shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees, or with both.*

Every state has its separate guideline and procedure to control the spread of COVID-19 which needs to be followed within the jurisdiction of that particular state. This advisory is to be read in conjunction with other guidelines issued from time to time by various Government bodies.

Released by:

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