

**GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA
POLITICAL DEPARTMENT**

ORDER

No. POL.85/2020/Pt I/112

Dated: Shillong the 6th June, 2020

SOP on preventive measures to contain spread of COVID-19 in religious places/places of worship

1. Background

In supersession of the Order No. No. POL.85/2020/Pt I/111 dated 5th June, 2020 the following SOP is hereby notified:

In this context, the Government of Meghalaya held a meeting with heads of religious organizations on 5th June 2020 in Yojana Bhawan, Main Secretariat, Shillong to discuss the preventive measures to be adopted in religious places/places of worship. Based on the said discussions, this SOP is finalized.

2. Scope

Religious places / places of worship get frequented by large number of people for spiritual solace. To prevent spread of COVID-19 infection, it is important that required social distancing and other preventive measures are followed in such premises.

This document outlines various generic precautionary measures to be adopted in addition to specific measures to be taken at particular places to prevent spread of COVID-19.

Religious places/places of worship for public in containment zones shall remain closed. Only those outside containment zones will be allowed to open up.

3. Generic preventive measures

Person above 65 years of age, persons with comorbidities, pregnant woman and children below the age of 10 years are advised to stay at home. Organisations managing the religious institutions to advise accordingly.

The generic preventive measures include simple public health measures that are to be followed to reduce the risk of COVID-19. These measures need to be observed by all (workers and visitors) in these places at all times.

These include:

- i. Individuals must maintain a minimum distance of 5 feet in public places as far as feasible.
- ii. Use of face covers/masks to be mandatory.
- iii. Practice frequent hand washing with soap (for at least 40-60 seconds) even when hands are not visibly dirty. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (for at least 20 seconds) can be made wherever feasible.

- iv. Respiratory etiquettes to 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.
- v. Self-monitoring of health by all and reporting any illness at the earliest to state and district helpline.
- vi. Spitting should be strictly prohibited.
- vii. Installation & use of AarogyaSetu App shall be advised to all.

4. All religious places shall also ensure:

- i. Entrance to have mandatory hand hygiene (sanitizer dispenser) and thermal screening provisions.
The religious organizations should place their respective requisition for thermal scanners with the District Medical and Health Officer, Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of Meghalaya who will make the thermal scanners available on payment basis.
- ii. Only asymptomatic persons shall be allowed in the premises.
- iii. All persons to be allowed entry only if using face cover/masks.
- iv. Posters/standees on preventive measures about COVID-19 to be displayed prominently in both English and Local Language. The Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of Meghalaya will make available such IEC material. Audio and Video clips to spread awareness on preventive measures for COVID-19 should be regularly played.
- v. Staggering of visitors to be done, if possible.
For the purpose of staggering, churches can have multiple services on any day. The duration of each service should be restricted to the minimum and should not normally exceed one hour.
- vi. Shoes / footwear to be preferably taken off inside own vehicle. If needed they should be kept in separate slots for each individual / family by the persons themselves.
Alternatively, provision should be made for placing a disinfectant tray at the entrance to sanitize the shoes.
- vii. Proper crowd management in the parking lots and outside the premises – duly following social distancing norms shall be organized.
- viii. Any shops, stalls, cafeteria etc., outside and within the premises shall follow social distancing norms at all times
- ix. Specific markings may be made with sufficient distance to manage the queue and ensure social distancing in the premises.
- x. Preferably separate entry and exits for visitors shall be organized
- xi. Maintain physical distancing of a minimum of 5 feet at all times when queuing up for entry.
- xii. People should wash their hand and feet with soap and water before entering the premises.
- xiii. Seating arrangement to be made in such a way that adequate social distancing is maintained.

As far as Churches are concerned, maximum number of persons allowed during any church service should not exceed one-third the seating capacity of the church. Further, one row in between two pews should be left empty. Individuals should also maintain a minimum distance of 5 feet.

Similarly, in Temples, Mosques, Gurudwaras and other religious places of worship, individuals must maintain a minimum distance of 5 feet.

xiv. Marriage Ritual in places of worship is permitted, provided that the number of guests should not exceed one-third the capacity of the place of worship and individuals must maintain a minimum distance of 5 feet.

xv. 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, 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.

xvi. Touching of statues/idols / holy books etc. not to be allowed.

For Churches, persons may bring their hymn books and Bibles and sharing should be avoided.

xvii. Large gatherings/congregation continue to remain prohibited.

For churches and mosques this is clarified in the preceding paras.

xviii. In view of potential threat of spread of infection, as far as feasible recorded devotional music/songs may be played and choir or singing groups should not be allowed.

In churches, even while singing hymns masks should be worn at all times.

xix. Avoid physical contact while greeting each other.

xx. Common prayer mats should be avoided and devotees should bring their own prayer mat or piece of cloth which they may take back with them.

xxi. No physical offerings like Prasad/distribution or sprinkling of holy water, etc. should normally be allowed inside the religious place.

During, Holy Communion in Churches, Priest/Pastor/Person who administers the Holy Communion should wash and sanitize their hands, and wear gloves if feasible, before administering the Holy Communion and to further ensure that there is no physical contact with the communicants. Similar procedure may be observed by other religious places of worship, if necessary.

Since in churches, one row in between pews has been left empty, hence collection of tithes and offerings is permitted.

It is also advised that baptism may be avoided for the time being.

xxii. Community kitchens/langars / “Ann-daan”, etc. at religious places should follow physical distancing norms while preparing and distributing food.

xxiii. Effective sanitation within the premises shall be maintained with particular focus on lavatories, hand and foot-washing stations/areas.

- xxiv. Frequent cleaning and disinfection to be maintained by the management of the religious place.
- xxv. The floors should particularly be cleaned multiple times in the premises.
- xxvi. Proper disposal of face covers / masks / gloves left over by visitors and/or employees should be ensured.
- xxvii. As far as practicable, live streaming of services, prayers and other rituals can be adopted by all religious organisations to cater to elder people, children and persons with co-morbidities.
- xxviii. In case of a suspect or confirmed case in the premises:
- Place the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others.
 - Provide a mask/face cover till such time he/she is examined by a doctor.
 - Immediately inform the nearest medical facility (hospital/clinic) or call the state or district helpline.
 - 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.
 - Disinfection of the premises to be taken up if the person is found positive.



(Shri. M.S. Rao, IAS)
Chief Secretary
Government of Meghalaya

Memo POL.75/2020/PtI/112-A

Dated: Shillong the 6th June, 2020

Copy to: -

- The Secretary to the Governor of Meghalaya for kind information of the Hon'ble Governor.
- The Private Secretary to the Chief Minister, Meghalaya for kind information of the Chief Minister.
- The Private Secretary to the Deputy Chief Minister, Meghalaya for kind information of the Deputy Chief Minister.
- The Private Secretary to the Health Minister, Meghalaya for kind information of the Health Minister.
- The Private Secretary to the all Hon'ble Ministers, Meghalaya for kind information of Hon'ble Minister.
- The Private Secretary to Chief Secretary, Government of Meghalaya for favour of information of the Chief Secretary.
- The Additional Chief Secretaries/Principal Secretaries/ Commissioners & Secretaries/ Secretaries of all the Department, Government of Meghalaya.

8. The Director General of Police, Meghalaya, Shillong for favour of information and necessary action.
9. The Commissioner and Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya, Health and Family Welfare Department for kind information and necessary action.
10. The Director, Information and Public Relations for wide publicity of the Order. The above order should also be translated in Local dialects (Khasi and Garo) and widely publicised. Copies of the same should be submitted to Political Department.
11. The Director of Health Services (MI)/MCH&FW)/Research), Meghalaya, Shillong.
12. The Director All India Radio for wide publicity of the above Order.
13. The Director, Doordarchan Kendra Shillong for wide publicity of the above Order.
14. The Secretary Autonomous District Councils.
15. All Deputy Commissioners, Shillong/Nongstoin/Mawkyrwat/Jowai/ Khliehriat/ Nongpoh/Tura/Ampati/Resubelpara/Williamnagar/Baghmara for information and necessary action.
16. All Superintendents of Police, Shillong/Nongstoin/Mawkyrwat/Jowai/ Khliehriat/ Nongpoh/Tura/Ampati/Resubelpara/Williamnagar/Baghmara for information and necessary action.
17. The Chief Executive Officer, Municipal Board, Shillong/ Tura/Jowai/Resubelpara.
18. Head of all Religious Organizations in Meghalaya for favour of kind information and necessary action.

Sd/-

Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya
Political Department

STATE HELPLINE NUMBER: 108

District Helpline Numbers	
State Surveillance Unit	9366090748
East Khasi Hills	7085281316
West Khasi Hills	9485395373
South West Khasi Hills	9485395373
West Jaintia Hills	6009693315
East Jaintia Hills	3655230605
West Garo Hills	9864939334
South West Garo Hills	6009944841/ 6009919788
Ri Bhoi	8787520449
East Garo Hills	9485113132
North Garo Hills	6009907768
South Garo Hills	7085100406