

**ORDER**

No.POL.117/2020/Pt.IV/210

Dated: Shillong the 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2021

**SOP for Puja Celebrations**

**1. Scope**

This protocol outlines various generic precautionary measures to be adopted during Puja Celebrations to prevent spread of COVID-19 and has been prepared after due consultation with the Central Puja Committee (CPC).

**2. Generic preventive measures**

Person above 65 years of age, persons with comorbidities, pregnant woman and children are advised to stay at home. However, persons who are fully vaccinated, i.e., have received both doses of the vaccine may attend the puja celebrations. In the interest of safety, it is desirable that all priests / CPC members / helpers / drummers / volunteers actively involved in the puja celebrations are vaccinated. Puja Committees are to be advised 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 masks to be mandatory.
- iii. Practice frequent hand washing with soap (for at least 40-60 seconds) even when hands are not visibly dirty or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (for at least 20 seconds), whichever 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 or District helpline.
- vi. Spitting should be strictly prohibited.
- vii. Installation & use of Aarogya Setu App may be advised to all.

**3. Pandal**

The Puja Committees will inform the Deputy Commissioner or SDO (Civil) on the puja pandal to be erected. The following protocols pertaining to erection of Puja Pandals shall be followed:

- i. Pandals may be allow to be erected as per requirement of the concerned Puja Committee. However, no pandal will be erected on PWD Roads. The committees will see that pandals are to be constructed keeping in mind the expected number of visitors.
- ii. Pandals are to be kept open to the extent possible to encourage cross-ventilation. Mandirs where permanent structures are available may remain as they are.
- iii. Barricades are to be constructed to regulate entry and exit into the pandals. No welcome gate will be erected on PWD Roads. CCTV will have to be installed in and around pandal areas/vicinities.
- iv. As part of the safety measures for the purpose of the celebration, it is mandatory to keep first aid and fire preventive equipment, including fire extinguishers and sand buckets in all puja pandals.
- v. Adequate lighting facilities in the approach roads to the pandals are required to be installed by the Puja Committee concerned.
- vi. Entrance to have mandatory hand hygiene (Sanitizers dispenser) or hand washing and optional thermal screening provisions.

#### 4. Regulation of Movements of Visitors/Devotees

All Puja Committees to prepare micro-plan to ensure that there are no large gatherings of devotees in the pandals keeping in mind the following points:-

- i. Separate entry and exit points for devotees and Puja visitors. Movement of devotees to be staggered and the number of visitors at any point shall not exceed 50% capacity of the pandal at any one time. Sufficient volunteers will be deputed along the entry and at key locations to ensure the staggering of visitors.
- ii. Volunteers should be appropriately stationed to ensure physical distancing and wearing of mask.
- iii. Adequate supplies of sanitizers and physical distancing floor markings to be ensured.
- iv. As far as practicable, thermal screening at the entrance of the puja pandal should be undertaken. All persons should strictly wear masks at all times.
- v. Pre identification of space in each pandals for isolation of suspect cases. Vehicles arrangements and drivers to be in place to transport any sick/symptomatic individuals.
- vi. People are encouraged not to venture out of their localities/areas. CPC may cause wide awareness on restricting inter-locality movement. An appeal to be given to devotees by all Puja Committees so that the members remain in their respective localities/ areas. Intensive awareness has to be given by the Puja Committees so that people do not visit more than 1-2 pandals.
- vii. Elderly people/pregnant women/ children/people with co-morbidity are advised to stay indoors.
- viii. Positive persons/High Risk Contacts/Anyone from a containment zone are not allowed to visit puja pandals or venture out during this time. Legal action will be taken against violators as per act and rules.
- ix. Symptomatic persons are not allowed to visit puja pandals.
- x. DM&HO may depute Medical Officers to assist Magistrates and Police as Sector Health Officers in each sector. They may attend the Sectoral and Puja committee meetings.

#### 5. Idols

The Puja Committees have decided to perform only the rituals of the Puja as per Hindu Almanac schedule:

- i. All idols should be in one frame and maximum height should not exceed five feet. Devotees will not be allowed to touch the idols.
- ii. Puja and offering of Anjali will be regulated by the organisers.
- iii. Offerings will be in phases. No sitting down and partaking of prasad. Only packed dry prasad may be distributed among devotees and visitors.
- iv. There will be no lunch or serving of cooked food. Packed food distribution may be allowed.

#### 6. Immersion of Idols

- i. The Puja Committees shall in consultation with the Deputy Commissioner or SDO (Civil) concerned decide on the schedule and number of Puja Committees allowed for immersion of Idols at the Immersion Ghat.
- ii. No foot procession will be allowed throughout the route of Immersion of Idols.
- iii. For Puja Committee with Idols, a maximum of 20 members will be allowed with two light vehicles and 1 (one) heavy/medium vehicle (preferably pickup van) to accompany the idol to the Immersion Ghat.
- iv. For Puja Committee without Idols, only 9 members along with two light vehicles may be allowed.
- v. Respective Puja Committees will select by name the members who will be in the vehicles and identity cards may be issued to them to avoid confusion. All persons involved in lifting idols, etc., are to be briefed on Covid protocols. Since minimum person-to-person contact has to be maintained, the committees will ensure that carrying and transportation of idols, immersion, etc, are to be minutely planned.
- vi. The movement chart shall be prepared in consultation with the Superintendent of Police or SDPO concerned and permission for use of vehicles on the immersion day is to be obtained from the Superintendent of Police or SDPO.

- vii. All Puja Committees are to strictly adhere to the movement schedule so there is no congestion at any point in and around the immersion site. Sector Magistrates to ensure that they move out within the stipulated time. There will be close coordination between magistrates, police and committees stationed at the site, on the road and at the respective boarding points.
- viii. The immersion should be completed by 4:00 P.M. Instructions to be issued to all puja pandals to ensure prior arrangements and avoid unnecessary delay in movement from the respective pandals to the Immersion Ghat. Central Puja Committee to ensure that all Puja Committees strictly adhere to the timing allotted for immersion of idols. Only 20 persons will be allowed to enter into the Immersion Ghat for Puja/immersion rituals.
- ix. On lookers/bystanders should not be allowed during immersion. Barricades should be erected to prevent bystanders and onlookers from entering the site.
- x. Immersion of idols is strictly prohibited in water bodies other than the designated Immersion Ghats, where arrangements for environment-friendly protocols for immersion shall have to be stringently followed including minimum possible retention in the water.
- xi. Guidelines issued by CPCB/MSPCB for immersion of idols as per environmental norms should be strictly followed. Immersion will be followed by immediate removal and puja wastes like flowers, leaves etc, should not be thrown into the river water.

### **7. Maintenance of Cleanliness**

- i. The Puja Committees should ensure to maintain cleanliness in all Puja Pandals at all time during and immediately after the celebration.
- ii. The Puja Committees should ensure proper segregation of waste at source in the Puja Pandals. Helpdesk with volunteers in each pandal for disposal of waste may be arranged.
- iii. The Puja Committees should follow the guidelines of the Central Pollution Control Board and Meghalaya Pollution Control Board, pertaining to Environmental Pollution.
- iv. The Immersion Ghat should be cleaned up 1 (one) day before and after the celebration by the Central Puja Committee in collaboration with the Municipal Board concerned.

### **8. Sandhi Puja**

Sandhi Puja is permitted on the 13<sup>th</sup> October, between 10:30 P.M to 12:30 A.M, together with symbolic drum beating for a few minutes.

### **9. General Guidelines**

- i. All Puja activities should conclude by 10:00 P.M (subject to relaxation of curfew timings).
- ii. No live sports, games and cultural functions will be allowed to be organized during the Puja-day celebrations.
- iii. Pandals will be kept simple with minimum embellishments and lighting.
- iv. In the interest of safety, it is desirable that all priests / CPC members / helpers / drummers / volunteers actively involved in the puja celebrations are vaccinated.
- v. Priests/Helpers/Drum-Beaters coming from outside the State will strictly follow the COVID-19 protocols in force and Entry SOP issued by the Government of Meghalaya on 06.09.2021.
- vi. Micro-planning at the Sectoral and Puja committee level will have to be mandatorily taken up along with Sector Magistrate, Police and Health Officials to ensure there is seamless coordination and all issues are addressed.

  
**(M.S. Rao)**  
**Chief Secretary**  
**Government of Meghalaya**