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Centre rolls out rules for opening hotels, temples

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SAGAR KULKARNI
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As India emerges from the lockdown, the health ministry on Thursday issued guidelines for a new normal that prescribe staggering of office hours, a ban on touching idols and holy books at religious places, encouraging takeaways at restaurants and closure of gaming arcades, cinema halls, children's play areas in shopping malls.

The Health Ministry issued standard operating procedures (SOP) for offices, religious places, restaurants, shopping malls, and hotels and other hospitality units with stress on maintaining physical distancing, use of face masks, and adherence to respiratory etiquette.

As a general preventive measure, the SOPs make it mandatory to have sanitiser dispensers and thermal screening provisions at the entrance of all establishments, with entry allowed only to asymptomatic patients.

The government, while announcing the Unlock 1.0 guidelines on Sunday, has left it to the Health Ministry to issue to SOPs to re-emerge from the two-and-a-half-month lockdown to arrest the spread of Covid-19.

According to the SOPs for offices, officers and staff residing in containment zones have been

asked to work from home, entry to offices would be permitted only on wearing of face masks which have to be worn all the time.

The SOPs also encourage video meetings, staggered office hours, lunch hours and coffee breaks and regular cleaning of offices and frequently touched surfaces. At religious places, the SOPs have banned the use of common prayer mats, physical contact while greeting, and choir and singing groups to minimise the spread of infection.

It also bars physical offerings such as prasad, distribution or sprinkling of holy water inside a religious place and asks to maintain physical distance in community kitchens and langars.

Restaurants have been asked to use disposable menu cards, only 50% to the total occupancy, use of paper napkins instead of cloth napkins and sanitisation of tables each time a customer leaves. For shopping malls, the SOPs have asked shops to keep the number of customers at a minimum to ensure distance, 50% occupancy at food courts and adequate crowd and queue management.

At hotels, SOPs encourage room service or takeaways instead of dine-in and use of intercoms or mobile phones as the preferred mode of communication between guests and staff.