

**Government of West Bengal
Nabanna, Howrah**

Memo No. 319 -CS/ 2020

Dated 28/09/2020

Subject: General Guidelines for Durga Puja 2020

This year Puja is being organised and celebrated in the middle of this unprecedented pandemic. This demands proper and adequate health safety measures for the citizens. Puja Committees must ensure the health and safety norms for themselves and for the participants and visitors.

In pursuance of the discussions and the resolutions in the Co-ordination Meeting of Government of West Bengal authorities with Durga Puja organisers/club representatives on 24-09-2020 at Netaji Indoor Stadium, Kolkata, following guidelines are hereby notified for information and necessary action:

1) Spacious Open Pandals with Separate Entry-Exit

Pandals shall have to be spacious and should be kept open from all sides. If in case it becomes essential to have closed ceiling the sides will have to be kept open and if the sides have to be blocked, the ceiling has to be kept open. Pandals must keep adequate space and arrangements for ensuring physical distancing in terms of the existing COVID 19 pandemic norms. There should be separate Entry and Exit arrangements with separate gates. Mingling and crowding should be avoided at all places. Floor markings and other signages should be made on entry and exit routes and assembly points to ensure compliance of physical distancing norms.

2) Compulsory Masks and Hand Sanitizer

Use of masks shall be compulsory for all visitors visiting the pandals. To meet any exigency organisers shall make adequate arrangements for distribution of masks in close vicinity of the pandal to the visitors who inadvertently come to the pandal premises without wearing masks. Use and availability of hand sanitizer should similarly be made compulsory in the pandal premises and neighbourhood.

3) Volunteers and Decongested Rituals

Puja organisers must keep volunteers in adequate numbers for ensuring compliance of the norms of physical distancing among visitors, for enforcing wearing of masks and use of hand sanitizers. Volunteers themselves should wear face masks and face shields for safety.

Keeping in view the health safety of participants and organisers, *Anjali*, *Prasad Bitoran* or *Sindoor Khela* should be organised by Puja Committees in a planned manner and to the extent possible in smaller groups with spaced out timings in a staggered way. Priests should use microphones to utter the *mantra* so that the sound reaches worshipers standing even far away and people do not have to assemble closely in small spaces. Devotees may be encouraged to offer *Anjali* with flowers brought from homes, so that flower collection points in the pandals do not become congestion-points.

4) No Cultural Programme

Cultural programmes in/near the Puja pandal premises shall not be allowed.

5) Low-key Award Judging

Judges for various Puja award programmes should not be allowed to enter Puja premises in huge convoys and large numbers. No more than two cars of judges at a time should be allowed to visit a pandal. Ideally all visits for 'judging' the Pujas should be virtual and physical visits should be confined to the lean hours (between 10 am and 3 pm).

6) Emphasis on Electronic and Social Media

Electronic and social media should be used by the organisers and public authorities to make people aware to avoid large assembly and crowding on roads and near pandals. Organisers/ volunteers and police personnel on duty shall facilitate continuous movement of visitors to avoid unnecessary crowding.

7) Low-key Inaugurations and Immersions

Inaugurations and immersions should be low-key and minimalist events without much pomp and grandeur. Wherever possible, inauguration should be

in virtual mode. In all cases, masks, sanitizers, physical distancing and no-crowd principle shall be followed. Pre-planned allocation of time of Ghat slots to different Puja committees should be strictly adhered to. Ghats shall be properly sanitised before and during immersions with arrangements that facilitate the required physical distancing norms under the current situation. *Protima* must be taken to the ghats directly without any stopover at any place avoiding unnecessary diversions.

8) Online Permission

Physical contacts must be avoided in the permission-obtaining procedures also. Online system for required permission should be arranged by the concerned authorities.

9) Spacing out the festivities over larger number of days

Adherence to the physical distancing norms and other health safety measures that are required to be ensured during the current times may need spacing out the festival over larger number of days. Puja Committees should make necessary advance planning that facilitates visit to Puja pandals from *Tritia* itself.

10) No Carnival

In the context of the pandemic and the need to have physical distancing norms, the State immersion carnival shall not be held this year. In similar vein, melas and carnivals near Puja pandals shall not be allowed.

11) Assistance from Government and other public and private organisations

Since public health management in the pandemic time will entail greater costs and energies for the organisers, the State Government and other public and private organisations will help the Puja committees/ organisers in the following manner:

- a) The state government Fire service authorities shall not charge any fees for their services. The State shall provide these emergency services free of cost.

- b) The local bodies (urban and rural) shall also provide their services free of cost, and no fee/charge shall be levied on any Puja Committee/organisers on this account.
- c) Concessional Power (at the rate of 50%) shall be provided by the power utility organisations. Separate notifications shall be issued by respective organisations in this regard.
- d) A onetime financial assistance @ Rs.50,000 per club will be provided by the State Government for enabling them to undertake the required arrangements to address the current pandemic situation, in addition to the other customary public services. The details will be elaborated in the Government order that would follow.
- e) The administration / police authorities shall provide necessary help and assistance to all Puja committees / organisers as would be required by them.

BE SAFE and STAY SAFE


Chief Secretary