

# Liquor, paan shop owners gear up for contactless sales

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**NEW DELHI:** A day after the Centre on Friday allowed the sale of liquor in standalone liquor stores as well as the sale of paan/gutkha and other tobacco products across the country from May 4 except in Covid-19 containment zones, stores are gearing up to resume business with social distancing norms and other guidelines in place.

The government has categorised all 733 districts across the country in three zones: red (hot-spots); orange (having a limited number of Covid-19 cases); and green (no cases). There are, however, strict social distancing norms in place. People going to such stores will have to maintain at least six feet distance between themselves and store owners will have to ensure that no more than five people are present at a shop at any given time. Spitting in public places remains punishable.

Liquor and paan shops inside malls or marketplaces are not allowed to operate yet. Neither are such stores in containment zones. Containment zones are those areas in red and orange zones that have been sealed due to a high number of Covid-19 infections. Only essential activities are permitted in these areas.

The government had prohibited the sale of liquor and paan/gutkha since March 24, when the

first phase of lockdown was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Since then, several states, including Kerala, West Bengal and Punjab, repeatedly urged the Centre to lift the ban on sale of liquor citing depletion of state revenues. Liquor is one of the major contributors to states' coffers.

The International Spirits and Wines Association of India (ISWAI), which has Diageo India, Pernod Ricard, Beam Suntory, Bacardi and others as members, had asked the union consumer affairs ministry to allow shops to sell alcoholic beverages for some hours during the day. Another body, the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverages Companies (CIABC), had also asked the government to allow the sale of liquor, citing huge losses.

ISWAI chairman, Amrit Kiran Singh, said, "We have committed to the government that social distancing will be maintained at the liquor vends. As soon as the latest guidelines come into force, we will begin a programme called 'Safe Shield', under which signs will be put outside all shops about social distancing. Sanitisers will be placed outside shops. . . "The aim of the 'Safe Shield' is to use services of online delivery platforms, such as Swiggy and Zomato, for delivery of bottles for which, he said, ISWAI is trying to convince the state governments.

A senior home ministry official, who didn't want to be named, explained on Friday that "the decision to reopen standalone liquor stores across all three zones has been taken as part of resuming economic activity...".