

Holi festival subdued in India over coronavirus concerns

Associated Press
Hindus threw colored powder and sprayed water in massive celebrations of the festival of Holi in India on Tuesday, but the enthusiasm was subdued compared to previous years because of fears of the new virus.

“People are scared this year, we have canceled our event,” he said.

Other groups in New Delhi also canceled their plans.

Atul Goyal, president of United Residents Joint Action, said there would be no gala lunches or water dance events.

“Considering the coronavirus outbreak, you are advised to cancel Holi gatherings, in particular playing with water and touching of nose, eyes and lips and shaking hands,” the group said in an advisory.

But many defied the recommendations in other parts of the country.

People danced and smeared each other with colors in the northern state of Uttarakhand. Still, “there has been some effect from the coronavirus on celebrations,” said Neeraj Kumar, a resident of the state.

Sellers of colored powder and water guns said their sales had plunged.

“The fear that customers have over the coronavirus and the large number of people that are getting sick has made them slightly disinterested in celebrating Holi. So our sales have become very less this Holi,” vendor Jitender Pandey said.



Women with their faces smeared with colored powder cheer during celebrations marking the Holi festival in Mumbai, India, Tuesday, March 10, 2020. Holi, the festival of colors heralds the arrival of spring.

(AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)

Brightly colored powder filled the air in most parts of North India. But in the capital, New Delhi, many events were canceled as the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country rose to 47.

Holi, which marks the advent of spring, is widely celebrated in India, Nepal and other South Asian countries. Most years, millions of people from toddlers to the elderly throw powder at each other and play with water balloons and squirt guns. But this year Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that he would not participate in public Holi celebrations because of the virus outbreak.

“Yes, it’s coronavirus that made us cancel our programs,” said Anshuman Ghulati, festival director of Holi Moo, one of the biggest Holi events in New Delhi which last year drew some 7,000 people from around the world.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.



A man smears the face of a woman with colored powder during celebrations marking the Holi festival in Mumbai, India, Tuesday, March 10, 2020. Holi, the festival of colors heralds the arrival of spring.

(AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)

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