

Guidelines for Doctors/ Medical Institutions authorized to issue Compulsory Health Certificates (Yatra – 2015).

1.0 INTRODUCTORY

- 1.1 The Holy Cave of Shri Amarnathji is situated at an altitude of 13,500 feet above sea level atop South Kashmir Himalayas. The high altitude trek to the Holy Cave involves exposure to extreme cold, low humidity, increased ultraviolet radiations and reduced air pressure. The oxygen level in the air is very low due to which many Yatris face respiratory and other related medical problems. The pilgrims have to trek a distance of 32 km from Chandanwari (Pahalgam Route) and 14 km from Baltal to reach the Holy Shrine.
- 1.2 Keeping in view the hostile nature of the Yatra area, the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board has been issuing Health Advisories. A copy of the Health Advisories and Do's and Don't's to be followed by the Yatris, is placed at Annexure A and Annexure B, respectively.
- 1.3 In July 2012, the Supreme Court took note of certain Press Reports about the mortality of pilgrims visiting Shri Amarnathji Shrine and constituted a Special High Powered Committee (SHPC) to, inter alia, suggest measures for upgrading the healthcare infrastructure in the Yatra area. The SHPC identified the following reasons for mortality in the Yatra area:
- i) **Non-acclimatization:** Any person who undertakes a trek in the high altitude area is required to necessarily undergo acclimatization for several days. Those undertaking the Yatra are un-acclimatized and rush to complete their Yatra within a day, as a result some of whom fail to recover from High Altitude Sickness and lose their lives.
 - ii) **Lack of proper clothing and footwear:** A large number of pilgrims do not carry adequate/ appropriate warm clothing and footwear, are susceptible to falling ill and those who already have serious Medical Problems (like diabetes, chest/ lung/ cardiac problems) are more susceptible to Medical failures.
 - iii) **Religious Practices/ Traditions:** Another reason contributing to serious Medical Problem is the insistence of devotees to take an ice

cold water bath in the morning and then commence their trek with an empty stomach.

- iv) **Profile of Yatris:** Very old men and women, adolescents and people already suffering from ailments are high risk prone to losing life during the Yatra which involves climbing in a high Altitude difficult area and sudden changes in weather conditions.

- 1.4 The SHPC in its Report has made more than 20 recommendations dealing with different aspects of Health Care facilities to be provided to the Yatris during Yatra 2013 and beyond, all of which are being implemented by the Union Government, J&K Government and the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board. One of the recommendations of the SHPC was that all Yatris should continue to furnish Compulsory Health Certificates while seeking registration for the pilgrimage. The SHPC further recommended constitution of an Expert Medical Committee to review the format of Compulsory Health Certificate (CHC) and suggest suitable modifications. The SHPC also recommended that the Compulsory Health Certificate shall not be issued by an RMP (as was prescribed for Yatra-2012) but by the Doctors/ Medical Institutes who are specifically authorised by the State Governments to issue Compulsory Health Certificate.
- 1.5 The members of the Medical Expert Committee (three nominated by Union Health Secretary and one nominated by State Health Secretary) deliberated on various health related issues which the Yatris have to face during this arduous Yatra and prescribed a revised CHC [containing part (A) and part (B)], a copy of which is enclosed as an **Annexure C** to these Guidelines.
- 1.6 Considering the advice of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board in its meeting, held on 31st January, 2013 has decided that no one below the age of 13 years or above the age of 75 years and no lady with 6 week's pregnancy should be allowed to undertake Yatra."

2.0 GUIDELINES FOR DOCTORS / INSTITUTIONS FOR ISSUING COMPULSORY HEALTH CERTIFICATE

- 2.1 Each applicant shall provide information to the Authorised Doctor/ Institution about his/her health status, past medical history and various ailment from he/she may be suffering or may have suffered as prescribed in part (A) of the Compulsory Health Certificate.
- 2.2 The Authorised Doctors/ Institutions shall issue the prescribed Compulsory Health Certificate [in part (B) of the format] after **detailed examination of the applicant and necessary investigation/ test, if needed, and having satisfied himself / herself as to the fitness of the applicant to undertake this arduous Yatra.**
- 2.3 **The Authorised Doctors/ Institutions shall not issue Compulsory Health Certificate to any applicant who is below the age of 13 years or above the age of 75 years and to pregnant lady with 6 weeks pregnancy.**
- 2.4 For Yatra 2015, the Authorised Doctors/ Institutions shall issue the Compulsory Health Certificates only after 10th February, 2015. The CHCs issued before 10th February, 2015 would not be valid for the Registration purposes.
- 2.5 All the doctors/ Health Institutions authorised by the State Governments/ UTs shall appropriately evaluate the health conditions of the applicant and after careful examination/ investigation ensure that Compulsory Health certificate is issued to medically fit applicants only.
- 2.6 The authorised doctors shall maintain proper record of the issuance of CHC so that the database so generated could be analysed for bringing about further improvements in the health care facilities in the Yatra area and /or for making further changes in the format of CHC.
- 2.7 **The Authorised Doctor shall mention his/ her MCI Registration Number in the Compulsory Health Certificate.**

HEALTH ADVISORY FOR PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY CAVE OF SHRI AMARNATHJI.

The Holy Cave of Shri Amarnathji is situated at 13,500 feet atop the South Kashmir Himalayas. The high altitude trek to the Holy Cave involves exposure to extreme cold, low humidity, increased ultra violet radiations and reduced air pressure. Under these conditions, one of the common risks for the trekkers is the development of acute mountain sickness (AMS). AMS, which affects the brain and lungs, is known to occur when you ascend to altitudes over 8,000 feet (2,500 m). On the icy heights leading to the Holy Cave, you may find yourself being exposed to the following high altitude ailments of varying degrees:

Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS): AMS is the most common form of mountain sickness and may occur after you ascend to altitudes above 2,500 m. It is characterized by breathing problems, headache, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, weakness, dizziness and difficulty in sleeping.

High Altitude Cerebral Oedema (HACO): HACO is a severe form of AMS and occurs due to swelling of the brain tissue which may eventually impair the brain. The illness often manifests itself at night and may result in coma / death within hours. Its symptoms include breathing problems, headache, fatigue, visual impairment, bladder dysfunction, bowel dysfunction, disorientation and partial paralysis.

High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema (HAPO): HAPO results in respiratory failure due to accumulation of fluid in the lungs. HAPO manifests itself at night (typically the second night of climbing in high altitude areas), progresses rapidly and may lead to fatality within hours. Its symptoms include shortness of breath even when resting, persistent dry cough, bright red stained sputum, weakness, fatigue, drowsiness, chest tightness, congestion and increased heart rate. Younger people are held to be more susceptible to this ailment as, in exuberance, they are inclined to over exert while trekking.

Dos for prevention of High Altitude Sickness.

1. Do prepare for the Yatra by achieving Physical Fitness – it is advisable to start a preparatory Morning/ Evening walk, about 4-5 km per day, at least a month prior to the Yatra.
2. Start deep breathing exercise and Yoga, particularly pranayam for improving oxygen efficiency of the body.
3. Do check with your physician prior to travelling to higher elevations, if you have any existing pre-existing medical conditions.
4. Do take time to acclimatize- while trekking, relax for a short while on steep inclines.
5. Do avoid exerting beyond your normal capacity.
6. Do check with your physician prior to taking any medications.
7. Do drink lots of water to combat dehydration and headaches – about 5 liters of fluid per day.
8. Do follow the prescribed food menu – available at Shrine Board's website, Shriamarnathjishrine.com – when having food in the Yatra area.
9. Do consume plenty of carbohydrates to reduce fatigue and prevent low blood sugar levels.
10. Do bring portable oxygen with you as it is helpful in case you have difficulty in breathing.
11. Do descend immediately to a lower elevation, if you start having altitude illness symptoms.

Don'ts for prevention of High Altitude Illness.

1. Don't ignore the symptoms of high altitude illness.
2. Don't drink alcohol, caffeinated drink, or smoke.
3. Don't ascend any further if you have altitude illness. Instead, descend immediately to an elevation where you can acclimatize.
4. Don't accept everything a sick Yatri says since his/ her judgment is impaired.

Annexure B

SHRI AMARNATHJI YATRA 2015

Dos and Don'ts

Dos for the Yatris

1. Do carry sufficient woolen clothing as the temperature may sometimes abruptly fall to below 5 degree Celsius.
2. Do carry umbrella, wind cheater, raincoat, and waterproof shoes as the weather in the Yatra area is unpredictable.
3. Do keep your clothes and eatables in a suitable water proof bag to avoid your belongings getting wet.
4. Do keep in your pocket a note containing the name / address, mobile telephone number of any Yatri proceeding for Darshan on the same date as you are doing, for emergency purposes.
5. Do carry your identity card / driving license and Yatra permit with you.
6. Do travel in a group, with porters / horses / ponies carrying your luggage.
7. Do ensure that all those comprising the group remain in your sight, lest you are separated from your group.
8. On your journey home, you must leave the Base Camps along with all other members of your group.
9. Do seek immediate assistance of the Police in case any member of your group is missing. Also have an announcement made on the Public Address System at the Yatra Camp.
10. Do help your fellow Yatris travelling with you and perform Yatra with a pious mind.
11. Do strictly follow the instructions issued by the Yatra Administration from time to time.
12. Earth, water, air, fire and sky are integral parts of Lord Shiva. Therefore do respect the environment and do nothing whatsoever to pollute the Yatra area.

Don'ts for the Yatris

1. For ladies: They must not wear saree while trekking during the Yatra. Salwar kameez, pant-shirt or a track suit will be more comfortable for them.
2. **Ladies who are more than 6 week pregnant shall not be allowed to undertake the pilgrimage.**
3. **Children below 13 years in age and elderly persons above the age of 75 years shall not be permitted to undertake the pilgrimage.**
4. Don't stop at places which are marked by warning notices.
5. Don't use slippers because there are steep rises and falls on the route to the Holy Cave. Only wear trekking shoes with laces.
6. Don't attempt any short cuts on the route as doing so would be dangerous.
7. Don't commence journey on an empty stomach. If you do so, you would be prone to attracting a serious medical problem.
8. Don't do anything during the entire Yatra which could cause pollution or disturb the environment of the Yatra area.
9. Don't use polythene as its use is banned in J&K and is punishable under law.

COMPULSORY HEALTH CERTIFICATE FOR SHRI AMARNATHJI YATRA 2015

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PART A: (TO BE FILLED BY APPLICANT)

1. Name _____ S/o;D/o; W/o _____

Address _____

2. Date of Birth _____ Identification mark: _____ Blood Group: _____

3. DECLARATION: Have you suffered from or have history of any of the following:

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| a) Breathlessness | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | b) Diabetes | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| c) Respiratory/ lung ailment | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | d) High Blood pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| e) Blood disorder | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | f) Asthma | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| g) Bleeding tendencies | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | h) Epilepsy | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| i) Heart ailment | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | j) Nervous breakdown | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| k) Joint Pains | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | l) High altitude/mountain sickness | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| m) Discharge from ear | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | n) History of stroke/ paralysis | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| o) Are you a smoker | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | p) Are you pregnant: | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
- (applicable to female Yatris)

q) History of Heart Attack; if yes, please specify _____

r) History of sudden death in family members; if yes, please specify _____

s) Any major injury in the past; if yes, please specify _____

t) Any other ailment; if yes, please specify _____

u) History of surgery; if yes, please specify _____

v) Are you undergoing under any medication; if yes, please specify _____

w) Are you allergic to drugs, foods and chemicals; if yes, please specify _____

4. I hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and nothing has been concealed.

Date _____

Signature/ thumb impression of the Applicant)

PART B: (TO BE FILLED BY AUTHORISED MEDICAL AUTHORITY)

On the basis of information furnished by the applicant, detailed examination and the necessary investigations, it is certified that **Mr/Ms/Mrs** _____ is fit to undertake the journey to the Shri Amarnathji Holy Cave Shrine.

Details of any specific test conducted before issuing the certificate: _____

Name of the Doctor _____

Designation: _____

Date of issue: _____

Signature and seal of Authorized Medical Authority
MCI/ State Medical Council Registration No: _____