



BRITISH ISLAMIC
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

MCB
The Muslim Council of Britain

Important COVID-19 Guidance for Mosques in the UK

Last updated 12 March 2020

Dear Mosque Leaders, Staff and Volunteers,
Asalaam alaykum, Peace be with you

This is an update to the guidance issued on 6 March 2020 regarding the coronavirus, COVID-19.¹ Emergency legislation will be introduced **next week** as containment measures to control the spread of the virus in the UK have not been successful.² The World Health Organization has now declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic.³ This will have a **significant** impact on mosques, madrasas and Islamic centers due to frequent congregation and social contacts.

What has happened?

At the time of writing, 456 cases have been diagnosed in the UK, and sadly 8 people have died.⁴ **This number is expected to significantly rise within days**, particularly affecting the elderly, and action by everybody is required **now** to prevent the disease from overwhelming the health system. **The worldwide fatality rate for those aged over 80 years is currently 14.5%. COVID-19 is also more deadly in people with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, immune suppression, and chronic lung disease.**⁵

What are the plans now?

The UK's Chief Medical Officers and public health bodies are using a model of 'reasonable worst case scenario' which draws on a variety of situations, some of which may never occur.⁶ These are balanced between the impact to the economy, society and public order. For instance, the premature closing down of public spaces can create fatigue, quickly become ineffective and

¹ <https://www.britishima.org/covid-19-guidance-for-mosques-and-islamic-centres/>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51786936>

³ <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#number-of-cases>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan/coronavirus-action-plan-a-guide-to-what-you-can-expect-across-the-uk>

contribute to panic. As local communities, it is imperative that we prioritise the safety of congregants specifically, over and above the economy.

In order to control the spread of COVID-19, mosques, madrasas and Islamic centers in the UK are strongly advised to take the following actions urgently:

1. Plan for suspension of congregational activities

This is not being currently advised **but is highly likely** in the coming days, should the outbreak continue at the projected rate. Therefore, it is advised that urgent action is taken to consider and organise the following, which may require a graded introduction to support the community:

- a. **Communication** - establish communication channels with attendees e.g. through WhatsApp, Telegram, email, website, or social media
- b. **Fundraising** - set up online fundraising channels and donation portals for attendees to be able to support the mosque remotely if they are unable to attend
- c. **Seriously consider shortening activities** - reduce *khutbah*, *salah* and any reminders to shortest time possible. Suspend praying of *sunnah* and *nawafil* prayers in the mosque, as well as external events.
- d. **Monitor** - check guidance from public health bodies which suggest suspension may be necessary, and if advised by public health bodies, be prepared to announce suspension of *Jum'ah* and daily *fardh salah* in congregation
- e. **Online services** – consider live-streaming programmes or showing programmes through a video-link so as to still be able to provide a service and reach congregants

2. Advise congregants to keep good hygiene

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said “*Cleanliness is half of faith*”. With the COVID-19 outbreak, it is now **more important than ever** to advise congregants to:

- a. **Avoid attending** - strongly advise attendees to not attend if they have any symptoms of being unwell no matter how minor or trivial
- b. **Avoid physical contact** - educate attendees on avoiding handshaking, hugging and close physical contact
- c. **Regular cleaning schedule** – clean the building regularly and thoroughly, particularly the carpets and *wudhu* facilities using the appropriate equipment and products⁷
- d. **Use hand gel** – provide hand sanitiser throughout the building, especially at entrances

⁷ <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-prevent-germs-from-spreading/>

- e. **Use disposable towels** - advise using disposable paper towels if *wudhu* has to be done in the mosque, and remove communal towels from the *wudhu* area
- f. **Prepare at home** – recommend attendees to perform *wudhu* at home and bring their own prayer mats
- g. **Read advice posters and resources** - prominently display hand hygiene advice, in different languages if required ⁸
- h. **Identify and maintain an isolation room** - for symptomatic attendees

3. Support for socially vulnerable and isolated

“Social distancing” is a strategy designed to limit public interaction to delay the spread of the disease and limit its impact on health services. This can be from self-isolation as result of suspected COVID-19, or from not having the usual access to the mosque community and space. This isolation could affect the most vulnerable in our communities, in particular the elderly.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “*Seek out the vulnerable among you. Verily, you are only given provision and support due to your support of the weak.*” (Tirmidhi). Therefore it is strongly advised to:

- a. **Volunteers** - identify volunteers who can support those who need support with daily activities e.g. buying food, deliveries, in case they have to self-isolate due to symptoms.
- b. **Broadcast** - consider broadcasting reminders and services on social media, radio and other media to maintain the link with the vulnerable during isolation.
- c. **Regular check-ins** - if necessary, establish regular pastoral support with the community via telephone or video-messaging to maintain morale.

What about madrasas/schools?

Current guidance does not support closing schools, but this too is **highly likely and remains under constant review**. Madrasas may wish to review the above guidance and follow it accordingly. Please be aware that whilst children are not thought to be severely affected by COVID-19, they can pass it onto elderly and vulnerable people.

What about Friday Jum’ah Prayers?

Friday *Jum’ah* prayers constitute a large gathering and the **recommendation to temporarily suspend them is very likely in the next few days**. The current advice is not to suspend them, however a graded approach to reducing core services at the mosque is recommended to prepare the community for this (see action 1 above).

⁸ <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/101-coronavirus-/resources>

What about Muslim burials?

Current guidance from the National Burial Council is available on how to handle, wash and bury deceased Muslims who have died due to COVID-19.⁹ It is important that mosques and the community are aware family members may not be able to attend the *Janazah* prayer due to self-isolation and should offer appropriate support/alternative arrangements for these families.

Will it affect Ramadan?

Looking at epidemiological data from other countries, it's likely that the pandemic will stretch well into Ramadan during April/May 2020. Authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have decided to suspend *iftar* and *itikaf* in Masjid Al Haram at present. UK mosques must similarly prepare for the **very likely possibility** of suspending *iftar* programs and congregational *tarawih* prayers.

Update on Hajj and Umrah

The suspension on travel for Umrah in Saudi Arabia remains. If you have members of your congregation who were planning to travel for Umrah or Hajj, please advise them to contact their travel operator and monitor the situation with the Saudi government channels. The Council of British Hajjis has issued guidance on this.¹⁰ The effect on Hajj this year remains uncertain.

Please note: In situations such as this, there will always be a wide spectrum of opinions on what are appropriate precautions to take given the circumstances, so consulting your local scholars early is essential, as well as bearing in mind the importance placed in Islam on the preservation of life. We would advise everyone - especially those who may disagree with some of the above guidance - to weigh up their position against the impact in what may be a life or death situation, especially for the most vulnerable in our community.

Collated by:

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⁹ <http://nbc.org.uk>

¹⁰ <http://cbhuk.org/news/general-news/coronavirus-outbreak-advice-hajj-umrah-travellers/>