

Joint Statement From the National Muslim Task Force on COVID-19 Regarding the Global Coronavirus Pandemic (also known as SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19)

March 18, 2020

Summary

The National Muslim Task Force on COVID-19 strongly recommends that Muslims in North America make every effort to support self-quarantine and social distancing as advised by your local, regional, state, and national public health or government authorities. Congregants should avoid all public gatherings to protect themselves, their families, and communities.

The Task Force recommends to mosques, community centers, schools, and other public centers, that **all non-essential gatherings be suspended immediately until further notice**. Mosques and community centers should follow guidance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in accordance with local and national public health authorities. These recommendations apply to communities at risk of COVID-19 and where recommended or required by local, regional, state, and national public health or government authorities.

Visit <https://www.imana.org/covid-19> for additional resources email covid@amhp.us with any questions or concerns.

Background

In this challenging time of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, it is hard for Americans in general and Muslims in particular to find trusted sources to guide them in their daily lives. People need clear, accurate and actionable guidance to help orient their lives in a calm and informed manner. In a matter such as this, Muslims need trustworthy religious and medical advice so that they can take the proper precautions to help families and communities in need, and simultaneously raise their hands in supplication to God asking for peace and protection for humankind.

American Muslims are greatly concerned about the health, welfare, and spiritual well-being of our nation. We are all in this together and must act collectively to prevent catastrophe and support one another. **This is a time for unity across all boundaries, be they race, ethnicity, class, religious persuasion or otherwise. To this end, numerous entities including religious, civic, community, medical, and public health organizations have come together to serve the educational, social, spiritual, and physical well-being of American Muslims and our society at large.**

The National Muslim Task Force on COVID-19 is providing this guidance to mosques, schools, and community centers throughout the United States. These critical actions are needed to help minimize and prevent harm from the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is dangerous for many reasons: **Anyone can get this disease; there is no vaccine for the disease and no immunity from it; there are no known treatments for the disease; many people with no symptoms are spreading the virus.**

For these reasons, COVID-19 is spreading rapidly and is hard to contain. To protect people we need to take critical and timely steps like social distancing, including suspension of normal religious activities. If these steps are not **put into practice immediately**, then we will **not have the healthcare resources** (hospital beds, ventilators, masks, and providers) **to care for all patients with COVID-19, as well as other critical diseases, within weeks**. It is vital that we as Muslims, who are called upon to be the best of communities enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, do our part and act decisively to protect humanity and societal good.

The Task Force makes the following recommendations:

1. Muslims in North America should follow local guidance and make every effort to support self-quarantine and social distancing.
2. Muslim community centers and places of worship should suspend all social and educational events and gatherings. Doing so is in line with important Islamic principles such as “avoiding harm takes precedence over acquiring benefit.”
3. Concerning religious counseling and similar services, we recommend mosques and community centers implement online and telephonic platforms immediately. In this time of difficulty, the community will be relying on their faith leaders for advice, support, and guidance. Moving these services to virtual platforms fulfills a communal need while limiting the possibility of harms occurring from the lack of social distancing.
4. Concerning congregational prayers, despite some areas of scholarly disagreement, there are areas of clear agreement among religious leaders and public health experts. Muslims are encouraged to reach out to religious councils for specific religious guidance. The Task Force is united in the following recommendations:
 - a. The 5 daily prayers are individual obligations. Although performing these prayers in congregation within mosques is highly recommended, when establishing prayer within mosques poses undue hardship or harm to oneself or others, performing prayer individually fulfills our religious obligation. Thus, in light of potential health risks to congregants, the Task Force urges mosques to follow long-standing Islamic legal precedent - aligned with local, regional, and national public health and government guidance - to suspend public congregational prayers.
 - b. Friday Jumuah prayers are important religiously, culturally, and socially, but the Task Force reminds Muslims these prayers are not obligatory in specific instances - such as for the sick - and there is significant Islamic legal precedent for exemption. This communal rite can also be fulfilled by minimal gatherings (the weightier Hanafi view notes 3 individuals represent a quorum) and with minimal sermonizing (hamd, salawat, tilawat, and dua). When a state authority temporarily prohibits public gatherings to protect people from credible harm, it is not permitted to establish a public Jumuah. Similarly, when it is infeasible to establish Jumuah in accordance with public health and safety recommendations of these authorities, the obligation to establish Jumuah is lifted. In these cases it is replaced by the obligation to pray Zuhr. Consequently, the Task Force strongly recommends that religious leaders suspend public Jumuah prayers.

The Task Force is made up of your neighbors who face this serious and frightening situation with you. We urge calm and collective action, and we are reminded by the Prophet Muhammad (saw) to “Tie it and trust” (Jami’ Tirmidhi 2707). God tells us in the Qu’ran that “*No disaster strikes except by the permission of Allah, and whoever believes in Allah - He will guide their heart, and Allah is Knowing of all things* (64:11).” We will get through this, and must act responsibly and must turn to Him for assistance.

The Task Force's advisory includes all the recommended actions noted above, and we call on our Lord to remove this calamity, protect humanity, and provide a swift healing for us all.

Signed,

- American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)
- The Fiqh Council of North America (FCNA)
- Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA)
- Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)
- The Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA)
- American Muslims for Palestine (AMP)
- American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
- CelebrateMercy
- Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
- Darul Qasim
- Emgage
- The Family & Youth Institute
- Imamia Medics International
- Initiative on Islam and Medicine (II&M), University of Chicago
- Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)
- Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA)
- Ma'rifa Conference
- Mercy Without Limits
- Mosque Cares (Ministry of W. Deen Mohammad)
- Muslim Alliance in North America (MANA)
- Muslim American Society (MAS)
- Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC)
- Muslim Caucus Education Collective (MCEC)
- Muslim Mental Health Lab, Stanford University
- Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
- Muslim Wellness Foundation (MWF)
- National Arab American Medical Association (NAAMA)
- North American Imams Federation (NAIF)
- Penny Appeal USA (PA USA)
- SWISS
- Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)
- United Mission for Relief & Development (UMR)
- Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA)
- Zaman International



Frequently Asked Questions

What is SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19?

SARS-CoV-2 is a virus that causes the disease called COVID-19. COVID-19 has been classified by important health authorities as a major threat to human life around the world, known as a pandemic.

COVID-19 causes a very contagious and potentially severe infection. It is more infectious and more deadly than other infections, like the seasonal flu virus. COVID-19 symptoms range from coughing, fever, and diarrhea to pneumonia; in some cases, it can lead to severe breathing problems (acute respiratory distress requiring ventilator support) and possibly death.

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus, SARS-COV-2, spreads from the mouth or nose when talking, breathing heavily, coughing or sneezing. Skin, tears, and other body fluids and tissues containing the virus land on other people and contact their eyes, nose, or mouth. A person can also get the disease by touching something that an infected person has touched, and then touching their face without washing their hands. Surfaces not cleaned by disinfecting agents can harbor the virus and transmit the infection. The virus can survive for days on doorknobs, countertops, towels, carpets and rugs, and other surfaces.

What happens when you're infected with SARS-CoV-2? How long does COVID-19 last?

After you are infected with SARS-CoV-2, it can take days to develop symptoms of COVID-19. During this time, you will not have symptoms, but you can still spread the virus. The majority of individuals who get sick will have mild symptoms and recover in about two weeks. However, some individuals will have severe cases and take 3-6 weeks to recover. Very severe cases can result in death.

Who is most at risk of getting critically ill or dying?

COVID-19 has the potential to impact millions of people and lead to hundreds of thousands of deaths. Your risk of becoming severely ill and dying increases with age and underlying health conditions. The most vulnerable individuals are the elderly (> 65 years of age) and those with diabetes, cerebrovascular disease (like stroke), heart disease, high blood pressure, lung disease, and/or weak immune systems.

Can I get COVID-19 in places of worship such as mosques?

There are several documented cases of Muslims getting COVID-19 in the United States and around the world. While we cannot be certain where they got the infection, everyone in America is at risk of getting infected, whether it is at the airport, theater, grocery store or places of worship.

Is this a Fatwa? What are other Muslim Countries doing?

No, this is not a Fatwa. This is a strong recommendation based on religious, medical, and policy data. Keeping the mosque open for routine group events is irresponsible, risky, and not in line with religious edicts, both local and international. We stress that **a person attending prayer at the mosque can have no symptoms for days and unknowingly spread the virus to those around them. This exceptional circumstance has led religious councils and Muslim states around the globe to take actions, such as closing the mosque for all events, both religious and otherwise.** We pray this measure is a temporary one, but it is one that coheres with medical and religious guidance. Indeed, because of the dangers of this pandemic, the Task Force strongly recommends mosques to support self-quarantine and social distancing in cooperation with local, regional, state, and national public health and government authorities.

Isn't Jumuah prayer important?

Friday (Jumuah) prayers are significant, culturally, socially, and religiously. Yet they are obligated upon certain portions of the community, and even then, there are many precedents and rationale for exempting individuals. Moreover, this communal rite can be fulfilled by minimal gatherings (as small as three, four, or five people) and with minimal sermonizing (*hamd, salawat, tilawat* and *dua*). At the same time, when a state authority temporarily prohibits such gatherings due to concerns of harm, it is impermissible to establish Jumuah prayer at the mosque. When it is infeasible to establish Jumuah in such a way as it adheres to recommendations of such authorities, the obligation is lifted. Jumuah is then replaced by the obligation to pray Zuhr. The Task Force strongly recommends that religious leaders suspend public Jumuah prayers in light of the many religious rationale allowing for exemptions.

Can the mosque stay open for other activities like counseling, small halaqas, etc?

As noted above, all mosque activities should be scrutinized. If public daily congregational prayers and public Jum'uah prayers are being halted, all other activities, which are arguably of lesser importance, need to be curtailed as well. As noted above, immediately moving counseling and other services to telephonic and online platforms is necessary. Community and religious leaders should work on creative ways to serve the community without requiring them to come to the mosque during this pandemic period. The National Task Force is putting together resources to support mosques, schools and community centers wishing to transition to online sessions.

What can I do to prevent spread and protect myself/family/community?

1. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, and practice good hygiene!

- i. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. This is especially important before eating, after you have been in a public place, and after blowing your nose, sneezing, or coughing.
- ii. If you do not have access to soap and water, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- iii. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, mouth and face with unwashed hands.
- iv. Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, and then wash your hands.

2. Stay Home. Save lives!

- i. Avoid close contact with people outside of your immediate household. Social distancing is an important way to avoid spreading the virus.
- ii. Regularly disinfect commonly touched surfaces in your house (e.g., door knobs, counter tops).
- iii. If you believe someone has a respiratory infection, stay at least 6 feet away.

3. If you are sick, call your healthcare provider and self-quarantine!

- i. If you believe you may have COVID-19, please call your primary care doctor, local urgent care clinic or emergency department **ahead of time** to confirm they can administer a test to confirm if you have the virus. They can also direct you to an appropriate testing site.
- ii. Stay at home to avoid spreading the infection. If you were in contact with your family and you have the virus, they are also exposed and should also quarantine themselves, even if they have no symptoms.
- iii. If you are at higher risk from this illness (aging adults, with existing cerebrovascular disease (like stroke), heart disease, diabetes or lung disease) or severely ill, call your doctor's office immediately for next steps. Stay in touch with friends, family, and neighbors to get the help you need.

4. Take steps to protect others; make social distancing a part of your life!

- i. Do not shake hands, hug, or perform any other physical greetings.
- ii. If you are a vulnerable individual, do not go to places with large gatherings or host large gatherings.
- iii. If you are young and healthy, it is still important to take precautions in order to avoid spreading the virus to the elderly and people with chronic diseases or weak immune systems.
- iv. Limit work meetings to less than 10 people; use web-conferencing.

5. Take care care of yourself!

In difficult times such as these, it is natural to experience feelings of distress and anxiety. Coping in a healthy manner with these feelings and getting assistance when you need it will help you, your family, and community recover. The Family and Youth Institute's [Coronavirus toolkit](#) and the Khalil Center's [informational mental health videos](#) can be used to help address anticipated issues: how parents talk to their children about the anxiety, pre-existing conditions, tips and tricks for working/studying from home and avoiding conflict, activities to strengthen relationships during self-quarantine. In addition to these resources, make sure to:

i. Share and Listen: Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling in order to lighten the stress you are feeling.

ii. Reduce News: Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can increase anxiety.

iii. Take Time: Take breaks throughout the day. Take care of your body by eating healthy, exercising, sleeping well, and avoiding substance use. Make use of the extra time by choosing face to face time with family members over electronic devices. Spend time connecting spiritually with Allah (SWT) through prayer, reading Quran, making dhikr, dua, and in contemplative meditation.

iv. Act: Serve others in your area by sharing extra supplies, making care packages, donating to food banks, organizing grocery delivery and meal trains for the vulnerable in your community. Being action-oriented helps restore a sense of control and reduce anxiety.

v. Remember your Lord: Prophet (SAW) encouraged us to recite this short dua in the morning and evening "*In the name of Allah, with whose name nothing on the earth or in the heaven can cause harm, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-knowing.*"

vi. Seek help: Reach out to mental health professionals if you feel overwhelmed. They are trained to help. People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment plans and discuss any new symptoms with their care provider. Many mental health providers now have sessions available online via video therapy (teletherapy).

vii. Check out resources available from organizations dedicated to supporting mental health and wellness:

1. Online Resources: [The Family & Youth Institute](#), [Muslim Wellness Foundation](#), [American Muslim Health Professionals](#), [Mental Health 4 Muslims](#)
2. Online Helplines: [Naseeha](#), AMALA, Khalil Center, Stones To Bridges
3. Mental Health Directory: National Muslim mental health professionals directory, SEEMA
4. Direct Services (including video therapy): [Khalil Center](#), National Muslim mental health professionals directory

What can I do to help?

1. Increase your giving to local community groups and national non-profits that are working on COVID-19 policy and providing direct services including food banks, clinics, financial relief.
2. Donate non-perishable items to local food banks.
3. Check in on your neighbors, particularly the elderly, sick, and most vulnerable.
4. Sign up for a mutual aid group to provide a range of services to those in need from babysitting or running errands to filling out forms. You can find local groups in this database [Collective Care is Our Best Weapon Against COVID-19](#) or follow guidelines on how to create a mutual aid group or network to assist the most vulnerable in your community.
5. Consider virtual volunteer positions to support your favorite organizations, whether that is phone banking, copy editing, letter writing, or technical tasks you can do from home.