



Joint Statement Regarding the Global Coronavirus Pandemic (Also known as SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19)

The joint panel pictured above strongly recommends the Muslim community take precautions to prevent the spread of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) infection.

We are making these recommendations after careful shared discussions, review of the current medical literature including CDC/WHO updates, and discussion with our local and international scholars/ulema. The medical recommendations are shared by the CDC/WHO and with specialists within the USA across a wide spectrum of locations and specialties. All are in agreement with these measures for the benefit and protection of us all.

Protecting human life is one of the fundamental objectives of Islamic jurisprudence. At times, preservation of human life is far more significant than continuity of even essential practices of devotion.

The Prophet (SAWW) and Ahlul-Bayt gave us specific guidelines to navigate threats to the community such as epidemics. Quarantine, social distancing, travel bans, and restriction of visitations and congregation are necessary preventive measures in the time of a pandemic. Threat to life and self-preservation is a genuine Islamic reason to forgo some of the fundamental Islamic actions and rituals.

Leading Maraaji (grand jurists) such as the offices of Ayatullahs Sistani and Khamenei have reminded believers to abide by the guidelines of local health authorities and medical experts in these times of global pandemics.

According to the office of his eminence, Sayyid Ali Husayni Sistani regarding daily jamaat and Friday prayers: “Wherever such a gathering has been prohibited in order to prevent the spread of the aforementioned [Coronavirus] virus, the prohibition must be taken seriously. If there is no prohibition, then there is no problem [in attending such a gathering] as long as the health guidelines are observed. Of course, if someone fears that as a result of attending he may become infected by the virus and suffer significant harm, or it may lead to his death, then that person must avoid attending.”

The global coronavirus pandemic (also known as SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19) is a serious threat to public health. It has the potential to spread rapidly and impact large populations if proper measures are not taken. For vulnerable individuals: the elderly (age 60+), or those with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes mellitus, heart disease, lung disease, immunocompromised state, this disease can be potentially life-threatening.

From both an Islamic and public health perspective, it is reasonable for the community to take aggressive measures temporarily to reduce transmission of the virus, including:

- Consider canceling daily congregational and Jummah prayers at the masjid based on the risk of COVID-19 infection in your community. Officials of Islamic centers, in conjunction with the health experts of the community, should monitor the risk level in their local areas and make informed decisions about continuing events.
- The deceased from COVID-19 infection should receive the Ghusl-e-Mayyit. The people performing the ghusl should utilize the same personal protective measures as those who are nursing patients with COVID-19 infection (this includes wearing an N95 facial mask, eye protection, gloves, and a plastic gown, proper handwashing after removal of the PPE and disinfection of ghusl site following the ghusl is necessary).
- Canceling “Sunday school” or halaqas
- Limiting meetings in favor of utilizing web conferencing

- Canceling conferences and social gatherings, even at home

Social distancing is one of the key concepts to reduce the spread of this potentially deadly disease, and hence, we advise individuals to observe the following measures to contain the spread of the virus:

- Those who are sick with symptoms of fever, cough, shortness of breath must avoid going to crowded public places.
- Frequent handwashing with soap and water for 20 seconds. Use of hand sanitizers with minimum 60% isopropyl alcohol is an acceptable alternative when handwashing is not possible.
- Always cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. It is best to use a tissue, which should be discarded immediately afterwards and wash hands immediately. If a tissue is not available, cover your nose and mouth with a bent elbow or scarf rather than your hand when coughing and sneezing.
- Avoid close contact with anyone even if they do not have cold or flu-like symptoms. Social distancing of at least 6 feet is recommended. Do not shake hands, embrace, or kiss others even with those who do not appear ill.
- Minimize direct contact with items that are touched by many people, such as doors and door handles, especially in public bathrooms.
- Carry sanitary wipes to clean any door knobs or handles one may come across and your personal cell phones.
- Islamic centers that continue their programs and events should constantly remind their participants of the precautionary protocol to protect themselves and others against the spread of this virus. However, please avoid bringing those who are the most vulnerable such as elderly people (60 years+) and those with underlying chronic medical conditions.
- Masjids, when open, should take extra precautions, ensuring that soap is available at the sinks, sanitizer is available. Masjid should be

frequently cleaned and disinfected especially areas of worship, tasbeeh, and sajdah. It may be preferable for attendees to bring their own personal tasbeeh and sajdah during the outbreak.

- Avoid travel to any region or country which has a high prevalence of COVID-19 infection (China, S. Korea, Japan, Italy, Iran). Religious sites such as Karbala, Najaf in Iraq, Mashhad and Qom in Iran should be avoided temporarily. Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia have already implemented a temporary restriction on Umrah visas.

The organizations referenced below who developed this statement are aware of the seriousness of these recommendations. It is only in the most extreme circumstances that we would request these measures be taken. We contend that the current situation with the novel coronavirus is such circumstance.

This joint panel will meet regularly to consult key medical, public health, and Ulama to support our communities. We are working together to compile the most pertinent and essential information. We are reminded of trials and tribulations from Allah (SWT) and must continuously pray to Him for safety and protection from all illness, for guidance to follow His way, and for success in this life and the next. The Qur'an quoted Prophet Ibrahim (p) as saying, "*It is He who created me and He will guide me. It is He who gives me food and drink and heals me when I am sick. He will cause me to die and will bring me back to life.*" [The Holy Quran 26:78–81].

Besides all these precautions and treatments, do not forget supplication to God, the Exalted, for He says, "*Your Lord has said, 'Call Me, and I will hear you!'*" [The Quran 40:60]

For more information about coronavirus (COVID-19), visit the Center for Disease Control website, www.cdc.gov. Further guidance will be provided with updated information, as this is an evolving situation.

Sincerely,

The Ahlul Bait Foundation of South Africa, Anjuman Wazifa Sadaat O Momineen of North America, Baitul Ilm Academy (IL), Baitul Qayem (NJ), Fatima Islamic Center (CA), Imam Al-Khoei Foundation, Imamia

Medics International (IMI), IEC Husaini Chicago (IL), Masjid-e-Ali (NJ), Masjid-e-Rasool (CA), Shia Association of North America, Shia Muslim Council of Southern California, Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA), Zainabia Islamic Center (CA)