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Guidelines

Shab-e-Qadar during COVID-19

Objective

To provide guidelines to the local authorities, organizers and participants of Shab-e-Qadar (mass gathering) for planning and preparation to ensure the minimum risk of COVID-19 transmission during the religious event.

Rationale

Public gatherings amplify transmission of Covid-19 and can potentially disrupt the country's response capacity. Shab-e-Qadar congregations should be organized in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures in order to minimize chances of spread.

Guiding Principles

The size of the gathering should be determined based on local safety regulations under the guidance of local health authorities, while keeping view of the local transmission of infection. Establishing direct links and channels of communication between Mosque/Imambargah committee focal person/ organizer, health authorities, local authorities, religious leaders and other relevant stakeholders.

- Districts with evidence of isolated cases or limited community transmission and < 5% positivity rate with no evidence of exposure in large communal settings should organize the Shab-e-Qadar following the SOPS and social distancing with ***the number of participants not exceeding the pre-decided and per-district quota.***
- The districts/cities with ***test positivity rates averaging more than 5% should be more vigilant in organizing Shab-e-Qadir gathering at the mosques.***
- ***Outdoor gathering only*** are strongly recommended during the Shab-e-Qadar congregation in which individuals should remain spaced at least 3 feet apart
- ***Children, and participants at higher risk for severe illness should not be allowed*** to attend the Shab-e-Qadar congregation (including older adults >50 years age and people of any age with underlying chronic medical conditions i.e., diabetes, chronic bronchitis etc.)
- ***Hand shaking and hugging should not be*** allowed while greeting.



Guidance during congregation of Shab-e-Qadar

- **Sign posting and Messages-** Post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances, in restrooms) that promote everyday protective measures in local languages.
- **Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette, Cloth Face Coverings/Face masks;** should be mandatory
- Conduct thermal and symptoms-based screening of attendees where possible

Social Distancing /Physical Barriers

- **Prioritize outdoor “bayan”** and congregation activities with seating capacity of 3 feet apart as much as possible.
- Use loud speakers at the congregation site so that people may hear the “bayan” while maintaining the social distancing.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that individuals remain at least 3 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g., guides for creating one-way routes)

Cohorting the Namazis

- Ensure that participants and groups are as static as possible by having the same group of the participants from the same house/districts in one demarcated location.
- The same house/district participants should be assigned to a fixed cohort of participants, where possible, to minimize the exposure of different groups to each other during the communal activities with social distancing.

Guidance for Namaz(salah), Taraweeh and Shab-e-Qadar Nawafil in Mosques-Imambargah

- Carpet or rugs will not be spread/laid in Mosques or Imambargahs, prayers will be offered on the bare floors as possible
- Clean Mats(chatais) can be used if the floor is earthen.
- If people wish to bring their own prayer mats from home, they can do so.
- In mosques and Imambargahs, where there is a courtyard, prayers will be offered not inside but in the courtyard.
- Those older than 50 years, adolescents, children and those suffering from flu, cough, etc should not come to mosques or imambargahs.
- Namaz-e- Taraweeh will be arranged within the boundaries of the mosques or imambargahs. Praying on roads and footpaths should be avoided.
- The floors of the mosques and imambargahs should be cleaned with Chlorine solution in water.
- The same solution should be used to wipe the mats (chatais) before Salah (Namaz).
- Rows of the praying individuals should be aligned so that there is a distance of 3 feet between individuals.
- It will be easy for the Namazi if the administrators of mosques and imambargahs place marks on the floors according to correct distances.



- People should come to the mosque or imambargahs after doing ablution and washing hands with soap for 20 seconds
- It is obligatory that mask is worn before coming to mosque or imambargah.
- In the districts with >5% positivity rates, it is better that Aitikaf is observed at home.

Food Service

- Avoid communal meals. Sehr and iftar should not be arranged at the mosque or the imambargah.

Wash Rooms /Restrooms/Ablution areas

- Do not allow crowds or queues to form near the restroom/ablution areas without maintaining a distance of at least 3 feet between individuals. It may be helpful to post signs or markers to help attendees maintain the appropriate social distance.
- Ensure that restrooms are operational, cleaned and disinfected regularly, particularly high-touch surfaces

Ventilation

- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible. If portable ventilation equipment like fans are used, take steps to minimize air from blowing from one person directly to another, in order to reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses

Note: The above recommendations are being regularly reviewed by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination and will be updated based on the international & national recommendations and best practices.

The Ministry acknowledges the contribution of Dr Urooj Aqeel and HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH team to compile these guidelines.

References:

1. World Health Organization. Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19, Interim guidance, April 2020
2. CDC, Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Interim Guidance

For more information, please contact:

HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH, PM National Health Complex, Islamabad

<http://covid.gov.pk/>

<http://nhsrsc.gov.pk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NHSRCSOfficial>

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<https://twitter.com/nhsrcofficial>

<https://www.nih.org.pk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/NHSRC-PK>