



BRITISH ISLAMIC
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Open letter to the Muslim community leaders from the British Islamic Medical Association

09/01/2021

Asalaam alaykum,

On 16 March 2020 the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) wrote to you about concerns and the high likelihood of harm to our community from Covid-19, followed by the Muslim Council of Britain's (MCB) call to suspend congregational activities issued on the same day, some time before the UK Government announced the first lockdown on 23 March. At that time, the rates of infection were rising and hundreds were dying each day; we were facing the unknown and uncertainty of what lay ahead. It has been one of the most difficult decisions for any of us, as Muslims, to take.

Today, we face a worse scenario. An ineffective government response combined with an emergent mutant strain considered to be up to 70% more transmissible has caused infection rates to skyrocket. As a consequence, the number of daily deaths has exceeded the levels reported at the peak of the first wave. Hospitals are struggling to cope despite increasing their capacity. Plans are in place to ration care when capacity breaches, urgent care for non-Covid cases is disrupted, and a major incident has been declared in London - with 1 in 30 Londoners infected with Covid-19. Whilst London has borne the brunt of the recent wave, the rest of the UK is projected to catch up within days. Importantly, we are continuing to see ethnic minorities being disproportionately impacted.

In light of the national situation, it is imperative to emphasise that all members of our community must stay at home during this lockdown. This includes no mixing of households, however trivial the reason or short the duration. Only unavoidable essential trips as permitted by law should be considered, and taken with utmost care. This is vital to control the spread of this virus, reduce hospital admissions and reduce preventable deaths. **We should continue to encourage greater Covid-19 vaccination education and uptake among our elderly and eligible at-risk groups.**

Mosques play a central role in our communities. They are essential for public life - not just as places of worship, but also as houses of Allah, which strengthen our faith and provide us with spiritual nourishment at a time of great distress. Mosques have been outstanding at protecting our community, and have continued to provide vital civic services such as food banks, meals for NHS staff, and provide volunteer support to vulnerable citizens. However, it is currently unclear if existing Covid-secure controls are adequate to stop the spread of this mutant strain. Many mosques in high risk areas, such as London and the South East, have proactively temporarily suspended congregational activities to protect the lives and livelihoods of the community.

Staying ahead of the curve is crucial, as the poor leadership and inaction of our authorities has repeatedly left the broader community exposed and vulnerable. Examples include the late decision to lockdown the first time, the delayed adoption of facemasks, the indecisiveness with closing schools, not testing arrivals at airports, the underperformance of NHS Track and Trace, and the disastrous Christmas bubble policy. We need to be proactive as we were before the first lockdown in March 2020.

During this pandemic we have learnt a huge amount. Not all parts of the country are as dire as London (although it is unfortunately likely that they may follow suit), and as this third wave spreads across the country, a tailored local approach that is cognisant of local pressures and intelligence from the national picture is a pragmatic way forward.

Timely action taken now will help us get ahead and protect our communities before the projected increase reaches its peak outside London Therefore, we ask our mosques and institutions to make the right decision for their area through the following steps, which BIMA and the MCB can assist with if necessary:



Whatever decision is made, we highlight the following key points:

- Regularly review your decision as the situation may change quickly. Reversal of suspensions is possible if we act promptly and decisively, and as further data emerges.
- In public health, preventative steps are important. Waiting for evidence in the form of rising local infections or deaths means any action is usually too late, particularly as the virus can spread unknowingly.
- The absence of reported evidence of transmission in mosques is reassuring but unclear if there is under-reporting of infected cases. It is also unknown whether these transmission data will hold truth for the more infectious mutant strain. We've seen the damage caused by delaying lockdowns, school closures, and mandating masks.
- Although some activities, such as grocery shopping are allowed, it should be emphasised there may be no reasonable alternatives for certain members of the public. (e.g. those without internet access or a support network)
- If a decision is made to suspend communal activities, provide the community with hope by signalling a decision review date, and keep as many activities online where possible.
- Aside from individual and congregational prayer, mosques undertake multiple activities so carefully consider which activities can be safely continued and which need to be suspended
- Continue to emphasise staying at home to your service users. Other than the home, nowhere is presently safe, and the community should be reminded frequently.

In the end - Allah is the Disposer of all our affairs, the Protector of us all.

JazakAllah khairun,

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[W] For more information please check out: <http://bit.ly/bimavaxxhub>