

COVID-19 Pandemic and Ramadan: Minimizing the Risk of Exacerbation of Disease

Saurabh RamBihariLal Shrivastava, Prateek Saurabh Shrivastava¹

Member of the Medical Education Unit and Institute Research Council, Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth – Deemed to be University, ¹Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth – Deemed to be University, Ammapettai, Nellikuppam, Chengalpet District, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Nations across the globe have taken multiple steps for the control and the effective containment of the corona virus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Amidst the developments of the COVID-19 around the world, the holy month of Ramadan is about to begin from the latest in April month. However, from the perspective of the COVID-19 containment, this can turn out to be an important event, as it will enhance the prospects of staying in close proximity and thereby increases the chance of the transmission of the infection from one person to another. In these difficult times, it is essential to make informed decisions for organizing any religious gathering and even consider the possibility of canceling the same depending upon the level of transmission in the nation and the preparedness of the health sector. In conclusion, Ramadan is an important religious event, nevertheless amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is the responsibility of the national and religious leaders to take a well-informed and scientific decision to safeguard the lives of people and also not create any opportunity for the exacerbation of the disease.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Ramadan, World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

Nations across the globe have taken multiple steps for the control and the effective containment of the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID 19) pandemic. Even then, the current tally stands at 4,731,458 cases and 316,169 deaths and the reality is that these numbers continue to increase with each day.^[1] It has been identified that the infection is transmitted from one person to another either through close contacts or via droplets and thus a wide range of social distancing measures have been advocated. In fact, it has been proposed to delay all social gatherings, cancel sports events, close workplace, or educational institutions, and people have been advised to stay indoors for their own safety.^[2,3]

RAMADAN AND COVID-19

Amidst the developments of the COVID 19 around the world, the holy month of Ramadan is about to begin from the latest in April month. This event is a social and religious gathering occasion wherein families and friends of Muslim community join together in the morning before sunrise and in the evening

after sunset to break their daily fast for a period of 1 month. In fact, some of the Muslims even spend last 10 days in mosque at a stretch for offering their prayers.^[4] However, from the perspective of the COVID 19 containment, this can turn out to be an important event, as it will enhance the prospects of staying in proximity and thereby increases the chance of the transmission of the infection from one person to another.^[4,5] It is important to note that in some of the nations, mosques, religious sites, and religious gatherings have been closed fearing the emergence of new chain of transmission.^[3]

Address for correspondence: Dr. Saurabh RamBihariLal Shrivastava, Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth (SBV) – Deemed to be University, Tiruporur - Guduvancherry Main Road, Ammapettai, Nellikuppam, Chengalpaet District - 603 108, Tamil Nadu, India.
E mail: drshrishri2008@gmail.com

Submitted: 20-May-2020 **Accepted:** 30-Jun-2020

Published Online: 16-Sep-2020

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as the author is credited and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

For reprints contact: WKHLRPMedknow_reprints@wolterskluwer.com

How to cite this article: Shrivastava SR, Shrivastava PS. COVID-19 pandemic and Ramadan: Minimizing the risk of exacerbation of disease. *Med J Babylon* 2020;17:297-8.

© 2020 Medical Journal of Babylon | Published by Wolters Kluwer - Medknow

Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:
www.medjbabylon.org

DOI:
10.4103/MJBL.MJBL_35_20

PREPARATION FOR OUTBREAK READINESS

In these difficult times, it is essential to make informed decisions for organizing any religious gathering and even consider the possibility of canceling the same depending on the level of transmission in the nation and the preparedness of the health sector.^[4] Any decisions taken to confine, revise, postpone, cancel, or go ahead with the conduction of mass gathering should be performed based on the thorough risk assessment performed by the public health authorities. If the events are cancelled, virtual options such as television and radio can be employed for ensuring that people can stay indoors and still meet their religious needs.^[3] However, if the religious gatherings are permitted, it will be ideal to implement different measures recommended by the national governments to minimize the risk of transmission and obviously it will require strong liaison with the organizing stakeholders.^[3,5]

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENERAL POPULATION

All the people who are planning to attend these religious gatherings should be advised to strictly adhere to the norms of physical distancing and not indulge in touching each other (through hugging or kissing), instead practice waving or nodding.^[2,3] As the elderly people and those with preexisting chronic illnesses are vulnerable population groups, it will be ideal to advise them to not attend such events.^[3,4] With regard to the gathering, it should be done either outdoors or in a place which permits good ventilation, for the smallest duration possible, involving a lesser number of people and with an aim to maintain physical distancing everywhere. Moreover, the worship places should be frequently cleaned, including the most touched surfaces and people should be encouraged to perform hand washing and comply with all the infection prevention and control measures.^[3,5]

As Ramadan month involves daily fasting, it is ideal that people should rehydrate themselves well, eat healthy and nutritious foods, and not consume tobacco, as it decreases the

lung capacity, which in turn can result in serious outcomes in COVID 19 cases.^[4] On the contrary, people should be advised to participate in some form of physical activity or stress relieving activity to ensure their mental and psychosocial well being. Finally, it will be very important to communicate all the decisions to the masses clearly after taking into confidence the religious leaders and avoid any religious outburst, which can significantly affect the prevention and control activities.^[2,4]

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ramadan is an important religious event; nevertheless, amidst the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, it is the responsibility of the national and religious leaders to take a well informed and scientific decision to safeguard the lives of people and also not create any opportunity for the exacerbation of the disease.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 120; 2020. Available from: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200519-covid-19-sitrep-120.pdf?sfvrsn=515cabfb_2. [Last accessed on 2020 May 20].
2. World Health Organization. 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV): Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. Geneva: WHO Press; 2020. p. 1-20.
3. McCloskey B, Zumla A, Ippolito G, Blumberg L, Arbon P, Cicero A, *et al*. Mass gathering events and reducing further global spread of COVID-19: A political and public health dilemma. *Lancet* 2020;395:1096-9.
4. World Health Organization. Safe Ramadan Practices in the Context of the COVID-19-Interim Guidance. Geneva: WHO Press; 2020. p. 1-3.
5. World Health Organization. Practical Considerations and Recommendations for Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Communities in the Context of COVID-19-Interim Guidance. Geneva: WHO Press; 2020. p. 1-5.