

Preventing transmission of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2): Advice for Asian Communities

First let us have some facts:

SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)
Transmitted through respiratory droplets
Symptoms of fever, cough, breathlessness usually come on ~5 days after exposure
Most individuals who carry the virus are asymptomatic
High levels of virus in upper respiratory tract in asymptomatic patients

Why are we worried about COVID-19?

1. Highly infectious - asymptomatic individuals spread the virus and this is why governments around the world have initiated lockdown to avoid infecting people at high risk

2. BAME groups appear to have a higher mortality rate from COVID-19 than white populations. The first 10 Doctors to die from COVID-19 in the NHS were Asian and I am seeing that there are a disproportionate number of Asian patients admitted with COVID-19, ending up on ITU and dying from COVID-19. Why this is the case is uncertain but the following reasons are all likely to play a part:-

- i) Poor understanding of the need for social distancing
- ii) Poor adherence to social distancing measures at all times
- iii) Poor understanding of the need for social isolation when symptomatic or when a family member is symptomatic.
- iv) Higher levels of diseases which may affect the immune system e.g. diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease. This is why some people have been advised to 'shield' for 12 weeks and essentially, not leave home in order to protect themselves from catching the virus.
- v) Poor control of the above diseases
- vi) Low levels of exercise and fitness
- vii) Lower levels of hygiene e.g. regular handwashing
- viii) Lower levels of vitamin D might be relevant

What should we do?

All of the above issues can be addressed and now is as good a time as ever. It is clear that lockdown, loss of visitors, loss of normal congregations e.g. in places of worship, weddings etc. are all having an impact on our ability to function in communities, but the whole world has been affected, not just Asian communities.

We must therefore, more than ever before, take on the advice given to us to stay at home and protect ourselves by adhering to the simple but difficult things such as minimising contact with others - this includes family members.

It is imperative that during lockdown, our community centres and places of worship are not areas where we congregate - we must stay apart.

It is sad, but imperative that we avoid congregating at funerals or other events which might occur during lockdown. We do not want one funeral to lead to another and sadly I have seen our communities congregate at funerals and put our own people at risk - we MUST not do this. Bereaved families will understand why we cannot attend to lend support and to grieve with them in these difficult times.

When lockdown ends, how quickly should we reopen our places of worship, hold weddings etc? The government will advise us, but with our elderly folk, it will not take much for them to become victims to transmission. We therefore need to be very very careful about returning to 'normality' quickly. We must avoid any need in our communities to congregate, as we do not want to give rise to the next surge of COVID-19 which will disproportionately affect our communities again. Even when we do open our community centres, temples, mosques, gurudwaras, the principles of social distancing, hygiene, shielding our most vulnerable and minimising the risk of transmission will remain important for several months, so things should not return to how they were before March 2020.

COVID-19 will pass and we will recover from this pandemic, but it will take time.

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