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Tuesday, 30th June 2020

COVID-19 Guidance for Gurdwaras

Background

SCUK and BSCF held a UK Gurdwara webinar on 27th June. Gurdwaras from across the country contributed, including Singh Sabha Southall, GTB Leicester, Newcastle and Gravesend Gurdwara.

Professor Whitworth¹ from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, a world-renowned expert on infectious diseases and public health also attended and provided advice.

This guidance builds on the 'good' practice shared on the webinar and the Governments (Ministry for Housing and Communities and Local Government) guidance issued on 29th June; **COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 July**

Introduction

This guidance should be read with previous guidance issued by the Sikh Council UK, which can be found on our website². General hygiene and safety advice has been covered in previous guidance.

This guidance will focus on the following areas; **Jora Ghar, Karah Parsad, Diwans, Kirtan, Amrit Sanchar, Anand Karaj and Langar**. We will highlight the government's guidance for each, followed by options for mitigating any risks and good practice (as per the UK Gurdwara webinar).

There is confusion within the Sikh Community, about what is guidance and what is a legal requirement. The Government guidance makes this clear, as below:

"Must" Where the guidance states that an activity must take place this is because it is a requirement under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020, and therefore is a requirement in law.

"Should" Where the guidance states that an activity should take place this is not a legal requirement under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020, however it is strongly advised that consideration is given to following the advice being given to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

¹ www.lshtm.ac.uk/aboutus/people/whitworth.jimmy

² www.sikhcouncil.co.uk

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➤ Matha Tekna	
Government Guidance reference:	Good Practice:
There are no specific guidelines from the Government except for 'private prayer' which is not the same as Matha Tekna.	There are concerns that doing matha tek with forehead and hands placed on the 'carpeted floor' could be a source of viral transmission. One alternative is to wear gloves and face coverings and place an environmentally friendly A3 paper on the floor and then take it away to be disposed in the bin after matha tek. The most important precaution is to clean the carpet frequently.

➤ The use of shared items (Jora Ghar)	
Government Guidance reference:	Good Practice:
Individuals should also avoid touching property belonging to others such as shoes which, if removed, should be placed and collected by their owner while adhering to social distancing principles.	Allow Sangat to take off their shoes and place them in 'Jora Ghar' themselves, self - service

➤ Food and Drink (Parsad and Langar)	
Government Guidance reference:	Good Practice:
<p>Where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship, they can be used, however the sharing of food should be avoided, as should the use of communal vessels.</p> <p>If it is necessary to handle consumables as a part of a faith practice, those giving and receiving food items should wash their hands thoroughly before and after consumption, or wear gloves.</p> <p>The person distributing the consumable should release it, into the hand only, in such a way to avoid any contact between them and those receiving it, or wear gloves. If accidental</p>	<p>Parsad- The following are examples of good practice already in place at some Gurdwaras:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karah Parsad is placed in foodbags that the Sangat can pick up from a table after doing 'Matha Tek' or on leaving Darbar Shaib. • Karah Parsad is given to Sangat by Sewadar by dropping into hands of Sangat member, without touching their hand. Sewadar can cover their face. <p>Langar- We recommend as per the government guidance to provide langar as direct service to those seated, to avoid queuing and touching of</p>



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<p>contact does occur, both people should cleanse their hands immediately.</p> <p>Hospitality spaces within a place of worship, such as cafes, are permitted to open but should be limited to table-service, social distancing should be observed, and with minimal staff and customer contact in line with hospitality guidance.</p>	<p>utensils, and if possible use disposable utensils. Only hot food should be served.</p> <p>The following are examples of good practice that were shared by Gurdwara committee members, preparing to serve Langar, on the UK Gurdwara webinar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As already the practice in some Gurdwaras, serve langar, whilst the sangat is sitting in Pangat on the floor, 2 meters apart. A marking for the 'thal' could be used as well to ensure social distancing. Sewdars to wear gloves and cover their faces, ensuring the utensils do not touch the 'thal' (as per Maryada). If tables are used, only use one side with social distancing, allowing the other side for Sewdars to serve the langar.
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➤ Singing, Chanting and the use of musical instruments (Kirtan)	
Government Guidance reference:	Good Practice:
<p>People should avoid singing, shouting, raising voices and/or playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting.</p> <p>This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission from aerosol and droplets.</p> <p>Therefore, spoken responses during worship should also not be in a raised voice.</p> <p>Activities such as singing, chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should be specifically avoided in worship or devotions and in rehearsals.</p> <p>Where essential to an act of worship, one individual only should be permitted to sing or chant, and the use of plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers from</p>	<p>We recommend that the Sangat listens to Kirtan, rather than joining in, during the current climate. It is not a legal requirement to only have one individual to sing, but only guidance. A risk assessment should be carried out to mitigate any risks.</p> <p>Below are examples of good practice already being used by Gurdwara Committee members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kirtani Jatha to observe social distancing on stage if possible, Kirtani Jatha sits facing Guru Granth Sahib ji on the floor with Sangat behind them (social distancing) Set up rope barriers separating Sangat from Kirtani Jatha Could use of plexi-glass screens, to separate Kirtani Jatha from Sangat <p><i>People should avoid singing at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult.</i></p>



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them, as this will further prevent transmission and the screen can be easily cleaned.

Kirtani Jathas, could sing in a low voice that can be amplified by the speaker system

➤ Anand Karaj (Weddings) and Amrit Sanchar (other life cycle events & Use of water)	
Government Guidance reference:	Good Practice:
<p>“Life cycle event” - Religious ceremonies to mark rites of passage, which are separate, self-contained ceremonies as opposed to marking a life cycle event or rite in the course of routine communal worship.</p> <p>No food or drink should be consumed as a part of the event unless required for the purposes of solemnisation.</p> <p>Use of water</p> <p><i>Where rituals or ceremonies require water to be applied to the body, small volumes can be splashed onto the body, but full immersion should be avoided.</i></p> <p>Weddings should have no more than 30 people present. Other life cycle ceremonies should also have no more than 30 people present, unless the event is part of a routine communal worship service.</p> <p>Worshippers should maintain social distancing.</p> <p>Large wedding receptions or parties should not take place after life cycle events. See restaurants and other hospitality industries guidance for further information.</p>	<p>Amrit Sanchar: This would mean that Amrit Sanchar can take place fully, including the sprinkling of Amrit. <i>As the guidance states: “Water applied to the body, small volumes can be splashed onto the body”</i></p> <p>Anand Karaj: We recommend that close family and friends attend Anand Karaj and as per the guidance, it is up to the Gurdwara management committee to do a risk assessment. This should take into account and include; how many people can sit in darbar sahib with social distancing taking into account the total floorspace as well as likely pinch points and busy areas (such as entrances, exits) and where possible alternative or one-way routes introduced.</p> <p>Wedding practices</p> <p>Milnee: A simple “Fateh” should be said between the fathers of the couple, after which Ardas is performed. During this the Sangat should maintain social distancing. No hugging or exchanging garlands should be completed.</p> <p>Breakfast: As per the guidance of langar, simple refreshments can safely be provided to the limited invitees provided adequate social distancing is maintained. We encourage Gurdwaras to avoid using catering providers as this increases the number of people in a Gurdwara, and simple basic refreshments can safely be provided from within a Gurdwara Langar.</p> <p>Palle Di Rasam : The father of the bride hands the pala to the bride- this can safely be completed by the father at arms length</p>



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	<p>Paath read By Granthi: The Granthi should use a hazooriya to cover their mouth when reading Gurbani. When the ardas is to be completed, the Granthi should maintain distancing from the couple.</p> <p>Lavaan: Only the bride and groom are to do parkarma of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Cultural custom of the brothers 'assisting' the bride should not be done.</p> <p>Kirtan: Ragis can safely perform kirtan following the guidance detailed above</p> <p>Sagan: The tradition of giving sagan must not take place as it involves guests coming close to the couple and one another.</p> <p>Lunch: Simple Guru ka Langar can be served to guests after the Anand Karaj following the guidance detailed above. Gurdwaras should restrict the use of catering companies.</p> <p>Other: Couple should work closely with Gurdwaras to ensure their Anand Karaj is simple and safe. Avoid practices such as “bridesmaids” or external decor.</p>
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➤ Cash donations	
Government Guidance reference:	Good Practice:
<p>Where possible faith leaders should discourage cash donations and continue to use online or contactless giving and resources.</p> <p>Where this is not an option, cash should be collected in a receptacle that is set in one place and handled by one individual, as opposed to being passed around. Regular cleaning and hygiene should be maintained, and gloves worn to handle cash offerings where giving continues</p>	<p>Use of Golak, that is fixed in one place, is already the common practice in all Gurdwaras.</p> <p>Where sangat wants to give donation and a receipt is required, suggest the person dealing with this wears gloves and face covering.</p> <p>Gurdwara can install contactless machines.</p>



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➤ Face coverings	
Government Guidance reference:	Good Practice:
<p>Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you. However, if you are infected but have not yet developed symptoms, it may provide some protection for others you come into close contact with.</p> <p>Face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including social distancing, minimising time spent in contact, and increasing hand and surface washing.</p> <p>These other measures remain the best ways of managing risk in a place of worship. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you and your household should isolate at home: wearing a face covering does not change this.</p>	<p>From the UK Gurdwara webinar, most Gurdwaras ask Sangat members to bring their own face mask, or any other face covering, such as a scarf or 'parna'. Some Gurdwaras provide these to the Sangat on entering the Gurdwara.</p>

Young people and children attending places of worship

Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian. They should wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly or use hand sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered. Places of worship can help remind children and young people, and their parents and guardians, of the important actions they should take during the COVID-19 outbreak to help prevent the spread of the virus.