

Friday, 02 October 2020

COVID-19 Guidance for Gurdwaras

Background

Guidance on COVID-19, has recently been updated, in relation to numbers of people that can gather. The updated guidance has created some confusion for Gurdwara Management Committees. We have developed this updated guidance from SCUK, in order to clarify some of the confusion. It is based on the Governments Updated (26th September) Guidance, which can be accessed on:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships>

Introduction

This guidance should be read with previous guidance issued by the Sikh Council UK, which can be found on our website¹. General hygiene and safety advice has been covered in previous guidance. Please consider if local restrictions are in place when reading and implementing this guidance.

Numbers attending Gurdwara and sitting in Diwan

Communal worship or prayer can be attended **by more than 30** people. Places of worship are exempt from the limit of 6, however people must not mingle or gather in a group of more than 6 within the Gurdwara (other than with those they live with or have formed a support bubble with).

Limits for communal worship should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following an assessment of risk. For example:

“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”

Kirtan

Government guidance states that:

‘Small groups of singers, including choirs, can perform in front of worshippers. Singing should be limited to a small set group of people’

Therefore there is no restriction in doing Kirtan in the Gurdwara. Examples of good practice:

¹ www.sikhcouncil.co.uk.

- Kirtani Jatha to observe social distancing on stage if possible,
- Set up rope barriers separating Sangat from Kirtani Jatha

Langar

There is no restriction on serving langar. However a risk assessment must be carried out when preparing Langar.

We recommend as per the government guidance for cafes, langar is provided as direct service to those seated in *pangat*, to avoid queuing and touching of utensils, and if possible use disposable utensils. Please see our previous guidance for examples of good practice that Gurdwaras already have in place'

Anand Karaj

The restriction on numbers stated in the Government Guidance only applies to the legal wedding ceremony **and not the Anand Karaj conducted in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee**. Government Guidance states:

"Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies (or formations that do not take place in accordance with such law, whether religious, belief based, blessings, or other forms of non-statutory ceremony are not covered ..."

The Anand Karaj is an essential rite in the Sikh Rehat Maryada whereas the civil ceremony (conducted by an official registrar) is the legal wedding ceremony as per UK law. Therefore, the COVID-19 rules that apply for weddings are not applicable to the Anand Karaj. Please also refer to our previous guidance on Anand Karaj.

However, it must be stressed that as per the section above about numbers attending the Gurdwara, it is the responsibility of the Gurdwara Management Committee to ensure that it carries out a risk assessment in relation to safety of its Sangat during the current pandemic of COVID-19.

Gurdwaras should advise families booking Anand Karaj to minimise guests and avoid invitations to those guests that live in local lockdown areas. Guests should observe social distancing rules, limit interaction and remain within their household groups.

Do's and Don'ts at Gurdwara

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DO	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out a risk assessment, to ensure safety of Sangat • Follow the mitigations that places of worship have put in place, for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break social distancing (2 metres between households, or 1 metre with mitigations, if 2 metres is not possible), and especially avoid touching people outside of your household.

<p>example using booking systems, changes to entrances and exits or staggered arrivals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you provide your contact details to the place of worship to support the NHS Test and Trace service designed to track and help prevent the spread of COVID-19. • Make sure only you touch your belongings, for example shoes if removed. • Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, particularly before leaving the home and returning. If there are no hand washing facilities available use hand sanitiser. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interact socially outside of your household, or the group (of 2 households, no more than 6 people) that you went to the place of worship with • Visit the Gurdwara if you are showing symptoms pf COVID-19
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