

Dear Faith Leaders

The situation in relation to COVID-19 (also known as Coronavirus) is evolving fast, and following the latest Government guidance, many places of worship have now suspended or significantly restricted religious services and other activities.

As you will know, COVID-19 is considered particularly dangerous for some members of our communities who are considered most vulnerable. These include, but not limited to the elderly people (over 70 years old) and those with existing health conditions including diabetes, heart disease & hypertension.

The government's guidance provides advice on social distancing and the measures we should all be taking to reduce social interaction between people in order to reduce the transmission of the virus. Some of the measures include:-

- Avoiding large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces.
- Avoiding gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media

I am asking faith leaders and their management committees to carefully consider the impact of faith gatherings and meetings on those considered more vulnerable within our communities. We strongly urge alternative arrangements such as having meetings via social media, internet streaming or individuals praying in their homes. These measures will help safeguard the health of those within our communities.

I recognise that taking these precautionary measures would mean making some very difficult decisions as to how to balance the needs of your worshippers with the Government guidelines. In some cases you may need to close your place of worship entirely.

The month of Ramadan in April 2020, may allow the virus to re-surge. In particular, the impact on elderly people in close proximity to young people could cause significant harm and potential for further deaths. Again, we understand there will be conflicting religious instructions which may influence your decisions. However, we must stress the outbreak will have a higher impact in London than in other parts of the country.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has been issuing regular information about how mosques could manage their congregation in light of restrictions:

<https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-updates/coronavirus-guidance-for-mosques-andmadrassas/>

Our aim is to ensure all communities, irrespective of faith, remain safe and well.

To assist with these decisions, The Interfaith Network for the United Kingdom have provided the following guidance for individual faith groups. They have also included suggestions for alternative worshipping and gatherings.

<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/news/faith-communities-and-coronavirus>

For further guidance and updates and the latest government response visit:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

Finally, many people within Croydon's faith community will want to support those around them. The Council is working closely with Croydon Voluntary Action to coordinate this type of activity. Please use the following link to let us know of any activities you are involved with or to direct those that might need support -

<https://cvalive.org.uk/coronavirus/>

Stay well, stay safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Ali', written on a light-colored background.

Councillor Hamida Ali

Lead Member Safer Croydon & Communities