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Islamic Relief Worldwide

Guidance on safe religious practice for Muslim communities during the coronavirus pandemic

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Acknowledgements

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We are also grateful to the scholars of Al-Azhar and elsewhere for the helpful and wise fatawa that have supported this guide to safe religious practice.

Introduction

The highly infectious nature of the novel coronavirus has led religious authorities around the Muslim world to issue guidance and fatwas on the obligation for Muslims to adapt and change their religious practice in order to preserve life. Islamic Relief Worldwide is issuing this guidance to communities who are at risk from this deadly disease. The advice is based on guidance developed and concurring within all the major schools of fiqh (jurisprudence) within the Sunni Muslim tradition and intended for use by Islamic Relief field offices and other aid organisations seeking to engage Muslim faith communities in the global fight against coronavirus.

Since the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of coronavirus (Covid-19) a pandemic, the number of cases around the world have been steadily increasing and in most countries the peak of the virus is yet to come. The disease can have a long incubation period of 10-14 days during which symptoms may not appear. This means seemingly healthy people can pass the virus on through normal social contact and by leaving it on surfaces where it can survive for up to three days. The elderly and those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, immune suppression and chronic lung disease are most at risk.

Many governments have banned major public gatherings to curb the spread of coronavirus and religious gatherings have been cited in several cases as having contributed to mass spreading of the disease. Most countries in the Muslim world have taken the unprecedented step to cancel congregational and Friday prayers, while some religious authorities have also suspended normal burial and bereavement practices. These measures are inevitably impacting Muslim communities, specifically mosques, madrasas and community centres in the run-up to and during the month of Ramadan.

We emphatically urge all Muslims to comply fully with the social distancing measures put in place and respect the edicts issued at national level by government and religious councils.

The Supreme Ulema Council (SUC) of Egypt's Al-Azhar University issued a fatwa (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognised authority) in March 2020 banning all congregational prayers at mosques to help stem the spread of coronavirus.

This was in response to guidance from the OIC and Muslim World leaders, such as Pakistan's President Dr Arif Alvi, who requested the Supreme Council issue guidelines for Muslims around the world on precautionary measures while performing religious obligations and rites. Numerous other national religious councils have issued guidance and fatwas, and we are grateful to the British Board of Scholars and Imams (BBSI) and other Islamic authorities for the guidance included below.

In light of the above, Islamic Relief offers the following urgent advice on safe religious practice for mosques and Islamic centres, Muslim communities and those vulnerable and isolated.

General advice for Muslim communities

This is a worrying time for everyone, and perhaps most of all the elderly and vulnerable. It is a time to take precautions, follow the advice of government and health experts and also take strength from our faith. Islamic Relief advises:

- Whilst taking reasonable precautions to protect ourselves and others, do not become fearful. Everything happens by the Decree of Allah.
- Remember the fragility of human life, and our ultimate return to our Lord. Turn to Allah in hope, longing, patience and prayer.
- Avoiding forwarding unconfirmed news reports on social media or elsewhere, for the Prophet (pbuh) said, "Sufficient for a person to be considered a liar is that they spread news without confirming it." (Hadith, Muslim)

The Prophet (pbuh) used to supplicate: "Allahumma inni a'udhu bika minal barasi, wal jununi wal juthami, a min si'il asqami." (O Allah! I seek refuge in You from leucoderma, insanity, leprosy and evil diseases)." (Hadith, Abu Dawud)

Support the vulnerable and isolated

We must be prepared to support those who are vulnerable and those who are isolating themselves out of precaution. As such, we advise the following:

- Urgently create digital communication channels such as WhatsApp, Telegram, social media, etc. This will help to maintain communication with the isolated and vulnerable. Imams are encouraged to engage in pastoral support through telephone or video-messaging.
- Recruit volunteers to help those who have self-isolated. Ensure that volunteers are thoroughly aware of relevant precautions (e.g. safety wear)
- Support those individuals and families affected in their local areas, while taking precautions for yourselves. "Allah assists His servants as long as His servants are assisting their fellow man," (Hadith, Muslim)

You can help by checking up on neighbours, especially the elderly and infirm, whilst taking relevant precautions if you or your neighbours are even mildly unwell. Do not assume that they have family to check up on them. If it is safe for you to do so, help out with shopping (leaving it at their doorstep), supporting food banks and other volunteering initiatives. Don't forget to also offer moral and spiritual support by phone.

Guidance for mosques and Islamic centres

We urge mosques and Islamic centres to prepare thoroughly by acting upon the following guidance:

- In countries and communities affected by coronavirus we strongly discourage Muslims from attending any mosque activities particularly if they are experiencing fever, cough, shortness of breath, breathing difficulties or respiratory symptoms. In this instance, they are excused from the congregational prayers (including jumah).
- It is religiously obligatory (wajib) for you to keep away and self-isolate if you have been diagnosed with Covid-19 or suspect you may be carrying coronavirus in order to prevent the virus from spreading. Preventing harm, especially to others, takes precedence over attaining benefit.
- Most Muslim countries have now rightly suspended collective worship but if congregants do gather they should keep a two-metre distance from others.
- Institute a regular cleaning schedule of buildings. Pay specific attention to cleaning wudhu areas, carpets, prayer rows and the entire prayer area especially after jumah. Clean all areas thoroughly with appropriate products such as disinfectant solution.
- If the mosque remains open, advise congregants to make wudhu at home and bring their own prayer mats. If wudhu has to be done in the mosque, remove towels and provide disposable paper towels instead.
- Install hand sanitiser stations or soap dispensaries with clear prominent signage giving hygiene advice. Advice should be in multiple languages if necessary. Some may be concerned that the alcohol in these sanitisers is considered religiously impure (najas) by some scholars; if so, a simple wash of water after use of hand sanitiser, which takes place during wudhu anyway, will suffice to remove the najas.
- Remind the congregation to avoid physical contact, maintain general good hygiene and take care of their health more generally, as it is an amana (sacred trust) from Allah.
- The elderly and chronically ill should take extra precautions because they are at greater risk of death from coronavirus. They should be strongly encouraged not to pray in congregation. Communities should systematically check on the welfare of these individuals.
- Congregants should be urged to wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds when returning home.

Ramadan and Eid

It is highly likely that the pandemic will stretch into Ramadan and Eid. Given the likely suspension of public gatherings, mosques should be prepared to suspend tarawih prayers, Eid prayers and all other congregational prayers. Muslims should minimise social gathering for events like iftar and Eid by remaining within their household where possible, and in particular ensuring the elderly and vulnerable are kept isolated.

Caring for the deceased: guidance on funerals and burials

The likely volume of deaths from Covid-19 means a collective response is required from the Muslim community in working closely with health services and local authorities, especially in non-Muslim countries where there may not be an understanding of the mandatory funerary rites afforded to the Muslim deceased. However, Islamic law also permits the relaxation of some of these rites in exceptional circumstances.

It is critically important that Islamic Relief response teams around the world work with local faith leaders at a national and local level to ensure they are integrating this advice and where possible providing consistent messaging to avoid division within the community.

We emphatically exhort community organisations, mosques and charities to mobilise the community to get trained in safe and alternative funerary rites.

Some key points for those involved in funeral rites are:

- Families should be comforted that their loved ones are honoured with the death of martyrs, and that any shortcomings in normal funerary rites will not affect this status.
- Health and emergency workers (including funeral workers) should not forget their own physical and mental health, nor that of their families, when caring for others.
- The risk of transmission of Covid-19 from a deceased body is low and should not be feared, provided adequate precautions are taken.
- All such precautions must be taken by those handling the deceased body, whilst ensuring dignity is maintained. The needs of the living take priority over the needs of the deceased. There are several options for ritual cleansing from: full ghusl, minimal ghusl, tayammum, and wiping over the body bag. Each should be considered in sequence, but if none can be done, burial without ghusl is permissible and arguably obligatory because of the risk of contamination. The World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines clearly indicate the virus may be present in bodily waste fluids.¹
- The body bag may be considered to fulfil the role of the burial shroud (kafan).
- Funeral (janaza) prayers should be performed by a minimum of people to avoid infection; alternatives include the absentee funeral prayer (salat al-ghaib).
- A number of options for burial can be considered, including shared graves, transferral to other sites, and delay in burial. Preparations should be made in advance, especially in areas with a large Muslim population.
- Cremation is forbidden (haram) in Islam and must be avoided at all costs. The WHO has confirmed that cremation is not necessary in the case of Covid-19 patients.
- Local communities are advised to take decisions on the basis of this guidance whilst factoring in local circumstances.

¹. See https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331538/WHO-COVID-19-IPC_DBMgmt-2020.1-eng.pdf

We are all returning to our Lord and should pray for those who have passed away remembering always the life to come.

Funeral rites

This section provides guidance on the burial procedures: storing, collecting, transporting, washing (ghusl), prayer (salat al-janaza), and interring the body (dafan) to ensure that they accord with both Islamic and best health practice guidelines. They take into account the latitude of approaches in Islamic law and the principles of standard infection control precautions (SICPs) and transmission-based precautions (TBPs).

This guidance is directed primarily at imams, scholars and funeral workers, to help guide their decision-making processes, but equally is produced for the benefit of the general public. It should not be considered a religious verdict (fatwa), but rather comprises a comprehensive guidance that draws on the classical traditions of Islam to provide an overview of options available. We encourage those who read it to consult with their local scholars and utilise it to help their decision-making processes. We pray that it will be of benefit and consolation during this extremely difficult time for the international community.

Honouring the deceased

For Muslims, death is a transition between one stage of life and another. The act of burial marks this passage and carries profound meaning for the dead as well as the living. Burying the dead is a communal obligation upon Muslims and it is a means through which dignity and respect are afforded to our fellow humans who have departed onto the next stage of their existence.

Dignity

Allah has bestowed a special status upon all humans, granting them dignity of the highest form in their bodies and honouring them amongst the rest of creation. Muslims believe that their bodies are a gift (amana) from Allah and will be returned to Allah. They take care to treat the human body with respect during life and after death. The funerary rites are designed to respect and maintain the dignity of the human form.

Desecration, harm, mutilation, cremation and disfiguring

Muslims are prohibited from causing or allowing any harm or mutilation to the human body both during life and after death. For this reason cremation is strictly forbidden in Islam (haram) and must not be allowed under any circumstances. Based on the belief that the dead must be treated as the living, the cremated body experiences a disrespect that is inconsistent with the honour bestowed to them by Allah. However, should a Muslim be accidentally cremated their relatives should be comforted with the belief that Allah can make the cremated body whole again for resurrection, so cremation is not believed to preclude the deceased from reaching heaven or hell. The funerary rites, such as washing, shrouding and praying are performed in order to honour the deceased, and burial acts to protect them from future harm.

Body and soul as a composite

For Muslims, the soul and body are inextricably connected from the womb of the mother to the womb of the grave and beyond. The human is understood as being a composite of body and soul, even after their physical separation at death. Hence Muslims do not distinguish between the bodies of the living or the dead, in that both are afforded the highest levels of respect and care. There is a deep metaphysical commitment that the soul is still aware of and able to experience what the physical body undergoes after death. Prophetic traditions further state that the dead can hear the greetings of those who visit them at their graves. Muslims are thus obliged to treat the dead with gentleness and care.

Rights of the deceased

One of the rights that Muslims have over each other is that of funerary rites. It is a collective obligation on the living to wash, shroud, pray over and bury the deceased, through respectful completion of the necessary rites and rituals as described in the primary sources of scripture and elaborated upon in the classical schools of law. These form part of a continuous tradition in Islam and carries deep religious, spiritual, historical and cultural significance for Muslims. These rituals may remind the wider public of other faith traditions who have similar beliefs around final gifts to those who have passed. Alternatives to burial are unacceptable in Islam.

Counsel to the bereaved

Humanity is going through a very difficult time. The death of a loved one is never easy. Despite the comfort of knowing that they are returning to their Lord in accordance with His divine decree, grief at one's loss is a perfectly normal response. This is even more the case in current circumstances where we may lose community members in large numbers. We may also not have the opportunity to bid them farewell in the traditional manner, due to fear of transmitting the virus, or adhering appropriately to government guidelines around social distancing.

Nonetheless, we take solace from the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him) when he said: "The one who dies in a plague... dies as a martyr in the path of Allah," (Al-Bukhari, Muslim). In every distress we go through there is a divine blessing and wisdom. This narration indicates that the one who dies from an infectious disease receives the reward of a martyr, which is a tremendous rank.

By scholarly agreement, such people are still afforded all the funerary rites, but families may be concerned about those rites not being performed properly during this very difficult period. There is a lot of confusion around what can and cannot be done, and also what might happen to the deceased if the funerary rites are not fully performed. This is understandable given the situation; however, we assure you that the Islamic tradition makes it abundantly clear that the souls of your loved ones will suffer no ill effects from any shortfall in this regard arising out of these circumstances. Furthermore, the tradition is clear that in such situations the community is not considered to be held accountable for what is beyond their ability to manage.

Rest assured that our and your prayers reach the Lord who hears all and answers every supplicant who calls unto Him. We beseech Him for His mercy and pray in this time, as in all times, for His grace and beneficence.

Counsel to health professionals and chaplains

Health professionals are on the front line of this pandemic along with pastoral and other faith workers, and the volunteers providing support to families and communities. They may find they have to administer last rites and even perform some burial rites.

It should be noted that, notwithstanding the various narrations about avoiding places of contagion, we know that the Prophet (peace be upon him) treated a leper by placing his blessed hand in the same bowl as that of the afflicted (Hadith, Tirmidhi). Please, therefore, be aware that what you are doing is fulfilling a specific sunnah (prophetic practice) as well as the general sunnah of assisting those in need. We pray that this work be a means for you to be drawn nearer to your Lord, in accordance with His wisdom.

We would advise you to take all precautions necessary to keep yourselves and your families safe during this very difficult period, especially if you have elderly parents or live with a vulnerable person, in which case you should consider quarantining yourself from them as far as possible.

End of life spiritual support

Given the lockdown measures currently in place in many countries, it may well be that those who pass away from Covid-19 will do so alone, in a hospital bed, not surrounded by family or loved ones. Whatever your field of work, but especially if you have access to such patients in their last stages, you are their family. Please take a little time, if possible, to minister to their spiritual needs at their critical end of life stage.

If possible, and if safe to do so:

- Comfort them and counsel them to hope in Allah's mercy and turn to Him, seeking His pardon, for they are returning to their Lord as martyrs, beloved in His presence
- Encourage them gently to recite the shahada and occupy their time in:
- Prayer (in the hospital bed, in any direction, with any slight head movement)
- Vocal remembrance (if possible given their breathing difficulties) or
- Silent dhikr (of the mind or heart, with a tasbeeh/sibha if that helps).
- For those in their very last stages, recite the shahada without encouraging or exhorting them to do so, and if you are able, recite Surah Yasin to ease their passing.

Tayammum

It may be that, as the rate of death increases, funeral services will be overwhelmed and ghusl will not be performed for the deceased. Our own scholarly advice is that it is not necessary for ghusl to be performed on coronavirus patients although respect should be provided for local religious edicts that are contextual to the situation in your area.

Only if it is possible:

- Keep a small, clean stone (about palm size ideally) with you.
- Once the patient has passed away, make the intention of tayammum.
- Rub your gloved hands on the stone and pass once over their face,
- Then rub again and pass over their forearms. Make sure to discard the gloves and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.
- This will fulfil the responsibility of ghusl of the deceased if it is impossible for it to be done later on, and will be a means of you single-handedly lifting the burden of this responsibility from the community.

Seek support for yourself

Lastly, Islamic Relief recognises that this period is going to be emotionally and psychologically very difficult for all those working on the front line of dealing with this crisis. It may be that you are transferred out of your comfort zone, need to work additional hours to cover unwell or isolating colleagues, and be confronted with a significant amount of death. This can be extremely stressful for anyone, even healthcare professionals who often feel that they should be able to deal with such situations.

If professionals and care providers find themselves struggling or nearing breaking point, please reach out to services that are available, whether psychological or spiritual, and seek help.

Fulfilling the rights of the deceased

There are general rights that the deceased have over the living. They are required to pray for their forgiveness and acceptance; fulfil their wishes and bequests as laid out in their wills; perform acts of worship, such as recitation of the Qur'an and asking Allah for the reward to be granted to them; and give lasting charity on their behalf.

There are also specific rights that the deceased have over the living, which are communal obligations. These are mainly funerary rites that are covered in this guidance. There are several stages of interring the deceased's body, each of which will be explained in detail:

- a. Storage, collection and transportation
- b. Ritual cleansing (ghusl)
- c. Shrouding (kafan)
- d. Performance of the funeral prayer (janaza)
- e. Burial of the deceased

Islamic Relief emphatically exhorts community organisations, mosques and charities to mobilise the community so that they are trained in alternative and safe funerary rites. There are several online resources available for this.

We recognise the very courageous work being done by funeral workers, who will largely be on the front line of dealing with the deceased. We understand that they will have a great deal of anxiety about handling the bodies and the risks of contracting Covid-19 themselves. There is a lot of uncertainty about this issue in the public, though top health experts and medical professionals have officially assured us that there is little to fear provided adequate PPE (personal protective equipment) is utilised. However PPE will not always be available in some contexts. This guidance takes as its priority the safety and health of those entrusted to perform the funerary rights of the deceased, and we ask Allah to reward you tremendously for the service you are providing: you are as those who guard the frontiers of the land from attack.

For these specific funerary rites, given the contagious nature of the virus and the possibility of contracting it from the body of the deceased, we strongly advise that there are those who should not be involved. This excludes presence at the funeral prayer and the site of the burial itself.

- Anyone over the age of 60
- Anyone with an underlying health condition (See Appendix A).
- Those who are in frequent contact with the above mentioned individuals
- Those who have not been properly instructed in the risks of dealing with suspected or confirmed Covid-19 positive bodies
- Those who have not received basic training in dealing with infectious bodies, which includes methods of handling the deceased, safe working procedures, donning and removing PPE, personal hygiene, and steps to be taken if something goes wrong.

In the course of work, individuals involved in burial tasks should carefully monitor themselves for symptoms of Covid-19. Any individual who fits the description of those the government has advised to self-quarantine or self-isolate should not participate in these burial tasks (see Appendix A).

It is very important, and possibly obligatory, under Islamic law for those vulnerable to the virus to act so as to avoid contracting it, especially in the situation where others are able to fulfil the rights of the deceased. We recognise that family members, under normal circumstances, play a leading role in these funerary rites, which also allow us to process our grief. However, the circumstance of a pandemic are different: it is a religious principle that one must avoid exposing oneself to, and exposing others to harm (la darar wa la dirar).

a. Storage, collection and transportation of the deceased

It is of utmost importance to treat the deceased with dignity and care at all times.

The burial team should be the minimum number of people required to carry out the task safely and effectively. They should gather all appropriate information regarding the deceased prior to collection: his/her condition, potential infection risks, and any other information relevant to those who will be handling the body.

A hazard notification sheet is often provided detailing this information. It should be read and consulted carefully. Due to the sensitive nature of the information contained in the hazard notification sheet, it should only be shared with those who require information to safely handle the deceased. Burial teams should wherever applicable take the duty of confidentiality seriously.

To minimise risk, the deceased may be placed in a body bag during collection and transfer. Individuals should avoid directly touching the deceased and minimise moving the body. Some local health authorities are not mandating the use of body bags for Covid-19 victims, though it is standard practice in some hospitals for all the deceased during this pandemic. Islamic Relief recommends precaution and strongly advises burial teams to consult the medical personnel on call regarding the use of body bags if the deceased is not already placed in one. In cases of likely risk of bodily leakage or delays leading to bodily decay, a body bag must be used.

During collection and transfer, individuals should abstain from activities that increase the risk of contracting the virus. They should:

- Not bring their hands into contact with their mouth, nose, or eyes
- Cover all abrasions and cuts, especially on the hands, with waterproof dressings
- Have available disinfectant material
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment which includes gloves, eye protection, face masks, waterproof gowns and sleeves, and, in some cases, respiratory protective equipment (RPE).
- Equipment should be stored properly, fit for purpose, worn properly, correctly fitted, and disposed of after use. Individuals should be trained in the donning and removal of such equipment.

Burial teams should pay attention to the equipment they use. They should have dedicated equipment (vehicles, trolleys, etc.) for use with infected bodies. Equipment used should be of a type easy to decontaminate and disinfect. Any equipment that has come into contact with the deceased should be disinfected regularly and after every use, such that the vehicle, tables or stretchers, surfaces and reusable PPE. Single-use items should be discarded safely and immediately after first use. After collecting and transferring the deceased, members of the burial team should: remove any protective clothing; dispose of such clothing safely; and wash their hands with soap thoroughly.

b. Ritual cleansing (ghusl)

It is the advice of Islamic Relief's scholarly advisors that in the case of coronavirus patients, ghusl is not necessary or advised, especially where it cannot be deemed safe and performed with the right precautions and PPE.

Washing of the deceased is a part of the Islamic ritual of honouring the deceased and a communal obligation on the Muslim community. Although this would ordinarily start with the family members, in this context those properly trained in PPE and with access to the appropriate equipment would need to take the lead.

Minimally, two people of the same sex as the deceased should be available for the washing, though more would ordinarily be required. Those selected to carry out the ritual cleansing should not be on the exclusion list noted above. Importantly, they should be aware of the Islamic rules on washing the deceased.

Provided the funeral washers take precautions, washing the Covid-19 suspected deceased can be safe. It should be noted that different health authorities may or may not make it a requirement for the Covid-19 suspected deceased to be sealed in a body bag and some have allowed hygienic preparations and even post-mortem to be permitted for those positively diagnosed with Covid-19. This is in line with their guidance for infectious diseases in general: it should be noted that Covid-19 is less infectious from deceased bodies than HIV, SARS, and Ebola, as well as other such similar serious diseases. The concern with Covid-19 is the likely volume and rate of funerals that will be required. Family and washers should be assured that all of the following guidance is both safe and in accordance with Islamic law.

A Covid-19 suspected body may be received from the morgue in one of two circumstances: with or without a 'DO NOT OPEN' tag.

1. In the case of a DO NOT OPEN tag, those performing the cleansing rite should don PPE and wipe over the sealed body bag from head to toe, after having applied some water to their gloved hands.
2. In the case where there is no 'DO NOT OPEN' tag, and in light of public health guidelines, it is possible for the deceased to be given a **minimal washing** with the following conditions:
 - That those washing the body wear all the appropriate PPE and are properly trained in its donning/removal
 - That all reasonable means are taken to minimise risk of transmission, such as avoiding procedures that are aerosol-generating (like moving the body around)
 - That the deceased does not suffer from any other condition that creates a significantly higher-risk of transmitting disease
 - That those in charge of burial are able to provide a safe and dedicated space for washing that is properly disinfected/ decontaminated after every washing procedure.

The minimal washing consists of:

- Minimal movement of the deceased's body
- Avoiding removing the disinfectant covering from the face
- Pouring water over the deceased's body from neck down
- Flowing hair may be washed or wiped
- Avoiding performance of istinja or pressing the abdomen to extrude contents

If any of the steps above cannot be safely undertaken, including not having access to adequate PPE, then the option to wipe over the body bag should be utilised.

If one is either advised by morgue staff that the risk of infection is extremely high, then – as a last resort – the deceased can be buried without either ghusl or wiping.

c. Shrouding (kafan/takfin)

Ordinarily, shrouding is carried out immediately after ghusl and it is recommended to use three white sheets (cotton or partly synthetic) for men and five for women. This is unlikely to be possible for the Covid-19 suspected deceased. In this case, Islamic Relief affirms that **the body bag will fulfil the religious requirement of shrouding**. An additional shroud may be wrapped over the body bag, though this is not required, and the body then placed in the casket. The outer part of the casket should be wiped with the appropriate disinfectant as part of transfer procedures.

d. Funeral prayer (janaza)

The ideal in the Islamic tradition is that there be a large gathering of people, including family members, to pray over the deceased following the ritual washing (ghusl) of the body. However, the communal obligation is also fulfilled even if only one Muslim (male or female) prays over the deceased.

It is envisaged that there may well be significant restrictions on gatherings, and that mosques may be closed for some time to come. In such a case, the funeral prayer may be performed in the cemetery, even though this is not ideal. The options are as follows:

1. Group performance of the janaza prayer with the family, whilst maintaining appropriate social distancing strategies, at the cemetery prior to burial.
2. Performance of the janaza prayer by a very small number of individuals (such as the washers) in the presence of the deceased's body. One individual praying over the deceased fulfils the community obligation (fard kifaya).
3. Performance of the funeral prayer in absentia (salat al-janaza ala al-ghaibin) by other family members and well-wishers, which is valid in the Shafi'i and Hanbali schools of law. [This does not remove the communal obligation mentioned in (2) above: at least one person should fulfil that, if possible.] Hanafis and Malikis should consult their local scholars about following this option.

Muslims should always be aware that actions are in accordance with their intentions, and that "One who intends a virtuous deed but does not perform it is like one who performed it." (Hadith) If you would have gone to the funeral had you been able to do so, but were unable owing to your health, the need to socially isolate or community lockdown, you will be rewarded as though you had gone. (For further details on how to perform the funeral prayer, please refer to Appendix C).

e. Burying the deceased

The burial may be attended by anyone, bearing in mind government guidelines about social distancing and community lockdown. The actual burial of the Covid-19 suspected deceased's body should not be performed by those on the exclusion list, as noted previously.

In the Shariah the minimal burial is for a body to be placed in the earth in such a manner where:

- The living are protected from the effects of bodily decay, such as the smell of the body
- The deceased's body is protected from mutilation or damage, such as by animals

The basis is that a Muslim is buried:

- In a Muslim graveyard, or the section demarcated for Muslims within cemetery grounds
- In his/her own individual grave if at all possible
- Without transferring the body an excessive distance from one area to another, and
- Without an undue delay

The Covid-19 crisis is unprecedented. Given the higher rates of deaths occurring from this illness, Muslim communities will be forced to make decisions regarding burial procedures that are not ideal. It should be noted, however, that classical jurists have given significant scope to depart from the ideal funerary rites in cases of need and necessity. Below, we provide guidance on a few issues pertaining to burials that will likely be pertinent to Muslim communities in the coming weeks.

Mass burials:

- A Muslim's body should ideally be buried in his/her individual grave.
- In times of general need (defined as any situation in which burying bodies individually in their own separate graves creates undue difficulty or harm), **the Shariah explicitly permits burial of multiple bodies in the same grave.**
- For a mass burial, it is ideal that:
 - Men are buried in one shared grave and women in another, or, if they are placed in a single shared grave, men to one side and women to the other. If this is difficult, it is permitted to bury them in one grave intermixed.
 - It is advised that each body be separated from the other with a barrier, even a small one formed with dirt, whenever possible without undue difficulty.
 - Muslims are buried together in their own cemetery, or, if not possible, in a grave separate to those from other faith traditions.
- Burying the deceased in a shared grave is preferable to an excessive delay in burying them in their own grave. See further related points in 'Burial in a non-Muslim cemetery' and 'Delaying burial.'

Burial in a non-Muslim cemetery

- Muslims should ideally be buried in a Muslim cemetery.
- If this is not possible for a valid reason such as lack of space, it would be permitted to bury a Muslim in a non-Muslim cemetery.
- When possible, a shared grave in a Muslim cemetery is to be given preference over an individual grave in a non-Muslim one. See related points below in 'Transferring the body' and 'Delaying burial.'

Transferring the body

- It is permitted to transfer the deceased in cases of need or for a valid purpose, such as a lack of space or capacity locally, or a bequest to be buried in one's hometown.
- Decisions to transfer the body should be made in close consultation with the family of the deceased, relevant authorities, and the communities/sites to whom/where the deceased will be transferred to.
- When possible, transferring the body for burial without delay, even a long distance, is preferable to an excessive delay.
- When possible, transferring the deceased to a Muslim cemetery, even if a long distance, is to be given preference over a nearby burial in a non-Muslim cemetery.

Delaying burial

- The default is to carry out the burial procedure as quickly as possible.
- Slight delays are permitted if there is need, such as when the burial team is seeing to the funerary rites of others or when waiting for a space to be allocated for the deceased in a Muslim cemetery. When possible, a slight delay to ensure burial in a Muslim cemetery is to be given preference over an immediate burial in a non-Muslim cemetery provided the deceased can be safely stored.
- Excessive delays should be absolutely avoided. It is preferable to transfer the deceased elsewhere, or bury him/her in a shared Muslim grave, than to excessively delay funerary rites and burial. This is a matter that requires sensitive consultation with the family of the deceased.

- In cases where there are no other options and it is not possible to bury without delay, it would be permitted to delay the burial and other funerary rites. The deceased in this case should be kept stored in a manner that prevents bodily decay, is safe, and upholds their dignity. For this, the relevant authorities and experts should be consulted and communities should anticipate and plan for scenarios where this will be likely.

How to bury the Covid-19 suspected deceased

- The burial and any activities associated with it should proceed as normal, but it should be restricted to the gravesite.
- Before transfer to the gravesite, the outside of the casket should be disinfected. Individuals tasked with carrying the casket to and from the transport vehicle should don the appropriate PPE, such as suitable single-use gloves. They should dispose of this equipment after first use and thoroughly wash their hands with water and soap or hand sanitiser.
- While transporting the deceased, it is recommended to engage in dhikr and supplication for the deceased.
- The funeral should be attended by a minimal number of people within current government guidance. Some governments and local authorities have set limits on the maximum number of people that may attend a funeral. As such, those arranging the funeral should consult their relevant local authorities regarding this. If there is no set maximum set by the government or local authorities but only a general instruction to keep funerals small, it is recommended to follow the guidance of the Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG), which has advised that funerals only be attended by immediate family or a few individuals. It may give some solace to those unable to physically attend the actual burial to have it live-streamed, though one cannot actually join the funeral prayer via live-stream. For those who wish, the absentia funeral prayer remains an option.
- Attendees should be told to observe all social distancing, self-isolation, and personal hygiene guidelines advised by the government. This means that for the time being the elderly, those with underlying health conditions, and those required to observe a 14-day period of self-isolation should not come to the funeral site, especially if the service will be attended by several people. We understand that this will be extremely difficult for people who were close to the deceased, but wish to reassure them that true proximity is when hearts are entwined, not merely proximity of bodies.
- Viewing of the deceased before burial is permitted, including the face provided this is medically permitted, as the risk of infection is very low. However, the deceased should under no circumstances be touched or kissed. See WHO advice for this (PPE, social distancing).
- The deceased should be lowered into the grave as normally done in funeral services.
- It is recommended by many jurists that the deceased be given an admonitory address (talqin) after burial, which may be expressed in any manner that conveys a meaning similar to what is related below:
 - Remember the covenant by which you exited this world; the testimony that there is no god but Allah who has no partners and that Muhammad is the messenger and slave of Allah. Remember that the Day of Judgment is coming and that Allah resurrects those in the graves. Say: "I have accepted that my Lord is Allah, that Islam is my religion, that Muhammad is a true Prophet, that the Kaaba is the true direction for prayer, that the Qur'an is my guide and that all believers in Allah are brothers."
- It is recommended to recite some Qur'an over the grave after burial and make a supplication for the forgiveness of the deceased.

Words of counsel

May Allah be praised – He is the Maker of the heavens and of the earth; the Creator of all things, and the One who sent His Chosen Messenger, our liege-lord, Muhammad, the most noble of all creation. Allah is the Eminent, the Forgiving, the Manager of all affairs, the Maker of destinies; who has brought all His creation into being, and makes it thus they change from state to state, and moves from one abode to the next.

Allah has established that we have not one life, nor even two – but five ‘lives’ in that there are five abodes of existences that we pass through. We all too often forget that, and we are tempted to think that the life of this world (dunya) is, the only life, when, in fact, it is the most passing and fleeting of all.

Rather, by Allah’s Mercy and His Grace, we have already lived through the abode of the life before this one, where all the souls were gathered, and we all took the covenant with our Lord, recognising His Unity and his Lordship. And from among those souls include the community of Muhammad – the community that you come from. Wahb ibn Munabbih narrates that when our liege-lord Moses asked his Lord about the community of Muhammad, Allah replied: “It is the community of Ahmad [another name for Muhammad], whose people are content with whatever little provision I give them, and I am content with whatever little good works they do. I make each one of them enter the Garden by their testimony that ‘there is no god but Allah’.”

And then we go through this world that we are in; and then we shall be placed in our graves; and then we leave our graves for the Resurrection and Gathering, until the moment that all of us reach our final abode. Remember of that time in the Gathering that our Prophet (pbuh) declared: “Each Prophet has one prayer which must be answered. They have prayed, but I have concealed my prayer, so that it may be an intercession for my nation, including, Allah willing, all those who died without partnering anything to Allah.”

That intercession is for the life to come; the life that is spoken of in the Qur’an (44:51-7) as: “Those who had taqwa will be in a secure place, in gardens and watersprings... a favour from your Lord: that is the supreme triumph.”

The Prophet (pbuh) noted to us: “The Garden comprises one hundred degrees; between each two degrees is like between Heaven and Earth. Firdaus is the high degree, from which spring the four rivers of the Garden. Above it is the Highest Throne. When you petition Allah, therefore, ask for Firdaus!” and, “A herald shall announce: ‘O people of the Garden! It is time for you to be healthy and never fall ill. It is time for you to live and never die. It is time for you to be young and never grow old. And it is time for you to be happy and never be miserable.’”

May Allah make us all people of the Garden, through His Generosity, His Grace and His Mercy.

Ameen.

Appendix A

People are greater risk from coronavirus

Coronavirus can make anyone seriously ill, but there are some people who are at a higher risk. For example, you may be at high risk from coronavirus if you:

- have had an organ transplant
- are having certain types of cancer treatment
- have blood or bone marrow cancer, such as leukaemia
- have a severe lung condition, such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma
- have a condition that makes you much more likely to get infections
- are taking medicine that weakens your immune system
- are pregnant and have a serious heart condition

Source: NHS (last reviewed 24 March 2020)

Appendix B

Self-isolation if you or someone you live with has symptoms

Do not leave your home if you have symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19) or live with someone who does. This is called self-isolation. If you are self-isolating, you must:

- Not leave your home for any reason, other than to exercise once a day – but stay at least 2 metres (3 steps) away from other people
- Not go out to buy food or collect medicine – order them by phone or online, or ask someone else to drop them off at your home
- Not have visitors, such as friends and family, in your home

If you have symptoms of coronavirus, you'll need to self-isolate for 7 days or until your temperature returns to normal. You do not need to self-isolate if you just have a cough after 7 days. A cough can last for several weeks after the infection has gone.

If you live with someone who has symptoms, you'll need to self-isolate for 14 days from the day their symptoms started. This is because it can take 14 days for symptoms to appear. If more than 1 person at home has symptoms, self-isolate for 14 days from the day the first person started having symptoms.

If you then get symptoms, self-isolate for 7 days from when your symptoms start, even if it means you're self-isolating for longer than 14 days. If you do not get symptoms, you can stop self-isolating after 14 days.

Source: NHS (last reviewed on 24 March, 2020)

Appendix C

Performing the funeral prayer

Please refer to your local school of jurisprudence (madhab). Two prominent schools of jurisprudence are:

Hanafi method

1. The janaza prayer is fard kifaya (communal obligation). It is fulfilled by a minimum of 1 person.
2. It is sunnah for the imam to stand in front of the chest of the deceased.
3. The necessary components of the prayer are the 4 takbirs and standing up.
4. It is sunna to read the thana after the 1st takbir, salutations on the Prophet after the 2nd takbir, dua for the deceased after the 3rd and it is wajib to do the salam after the 4th takbir.
5. The hands should only be raised for the 1st takbir.
6. Sura al-Fatiha can be prayed after the thana with the intention of dua and not qiraat.
7. Supplicating for forgiveness is not required for a child or an insane person; on the contrary the dua should be made that the children are a source of salvation for us.

Shafi'i method

The funeral prayer (salat al-janaza) is a communal obligation, requiring a minimum of 1 person to pray it. For those that are unable to attend the salat al-janaza in person, they may pray the absentee funeral prayer (salat al-gha'ib).

The following will apply:

1. The body of the deceased should be placed between the imam and the qibla, with the head to the right and the feet to the left. The imam should preferably be in front of the head of the body, if the body is a man, or to the midpoint of the body, if the body is a woman. (This condition does not exist for those praying salat al-ghaib).
2. One stands, intending to pray an obligatory funeral prayer, with the intention occurring at the time of the opening takbir. (For those praying salat al-ghaib, they intend to pray a sunnah prayer that is salat al-ghaib.)
3. The opening takbir (Allahu akbar) is then followed by the reciting of surah al-Fatiha (quietly, to one's self)
4. Then this is followed by a second takbir, which is then followed by quietly saying 'alhamdulillah,' and then (quietly, to one's self) recitation of the prayer upon the Prophet, upon whom be blessings and peace, in the same way that one would do so in the second half of the tashhahud in the ritual daily prayer
5. Which is then followed by a third takbir; which is then followed by (quietly, to one's self) supplicating for the deceased. It is recommended one says, "Allahumma la tahrimna ajrahu wa la taftina ba'dahu wa-ghfir lana wa lahu" ("O Allah, do not deprive us of his reward, nor afflict us after him. [O Allah,] grant us and him forgiveness.")
6. Which is then followed by a fourth takbir; which is then followed by (quietly, to one's self) praying for all the Muslims;
7. Which is then followed by saying aloud 'Assalamu alaykum' to the right, and then to the left.

Appendix D

Guidance for the safe wearing of PPE

REASON FOR ISSUE	GOV.UK - Covid-19 guidance for health professionals
NOTES	This PPE ensemble is more enhanced than pandemic flu requirements due to COVID-19 being a novel coronavirus and the evidence base for transmission limited. Therefore, this is based on expert opinion to date and may be revised as the situation evolves.

Use safe work practices to protect yourself and limit the spread of infection

Putting on PPE	Step by step
Before you start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure you are hydrated • Remove jewellery and tie hair back • Check you have all the PPE you need, in the correct size
Hand hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow NHS Guidelines when washing hands • Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces • Rub hands palm to palm with interlaced fingers • It should take at least 15 seconds
Gown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put on a long-sleeved fluid repellent disposable gown • Fasten neckties and waste ties
Respirator (FFP3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that you are familiar with the FFP3 respirator conforming to EN149 • Ensure that fit testing has been undertaken before using this equipment
Eyewear (preferably a full face visor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye protection, such as single use goggles or full-face visors, must be worn • NOTE: Prescription glasses are not adequate protection
Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double gloves can be used • Change gloves when moving from a dirty to a clean task • Remove glove (see removal instructions) • Decontaminate hands with alcohol hand-rub • Put on a pair of clean gloves, ensuring that the cuffs of the gloves cover the cuffs of the gown,

Source: Public Health England, Covid-19: infection prevention and control guidance (last reviewed 23 March, 2020)

Appendix E

Guidance for the safe removal of PPE

Removing PPE	Step by step
<p>Before you start: read the adjacent notes</p>	<p>PPE should be removed in an order that minimises the potential for cross contamination. This should be done within the mortuary area and in a systematic way. All PPE should be disposed of as clinical waste.</p>
<p>Gloves: the outside of the gloves are contaminated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grasp the outside of the glove with the opposite gloved hand; peel off • hold the removed glove in the gloved hand • slide the fingers of the un-gloved hand under the remaining glove at the wrist • peel the remaining glove off over the first glove and discard • clean hands with alcohol rub
<p>Gown: the front of the gown and sleeves will be contaminated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unfasten neck then waste ties • pull gown away from the neck and shoulders, touching the inside of the gown only using a peeling motion as the outside of the gown will be contaminated • turn the gown inside out, fold or roll into bundle and discard into a lined waste bin
<p>Eye protection (preferably a full-face visor): the outside will be contaminated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to remove, use both hands to handle the retraining straps by pulling away from behind and discard • clean hands with alcohol hand rub
<p>Respirator (FFP3): remove FFP3 respirators in a safe area (adjacent to the mortuary or preparation room)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do not touch the front of the respirator as it will be contaminated • lean forward slightly • reach to the back of the head with both hands to find the bottom retaining strap and bring it up to the top strap • lift straps over the top of the head • let the respirator fall away from your face and place in bin • wash hands with soap and water

Guidance For Burial & Funerals During The Corona Pandemic (BBSIG-03)

Glossary of Islamic terms and abbreviations

Amana	A trust given to someone or mankind
Dafan	Burying the deceased
Dhikr	Remembrance of Allah
Durud	Farsi word for praying salutations upon the Prophet
Fard kifaya	Communal obligations
Ghusl	Ritual washing of the deceased
Hadith	A saying or deed reported authentically from the Prophet Muhammad's life
Haram	Religiously forbidden
Iftar	Breaking of the fast at sunset
Istinja	Cleaning of human waste from the private parts
Kafan	Shroud
Najas	Unclean substances and human waste that invalidates prayer if on clothes or surrounding area
Pbuh	Abbreviation of 'peace be upon him'
Qibla	Direction of prayer towards the Kaaba
Salat Ibrahim	Salutation on the Prophet (pbuh) often recited in prayer
Salat al janaza	Funeral prayer
Salat al janaza ala al-ghai-been/ salat al-ghaib	Funeral prayer in absentia
Shahada	Testimony of faith
Sibha	Rosary bead
Sunnah	Life practice of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
Takbir	To say Allahu Akbar
Talqin	Admonitory address (to recite la ilaha illa Allahu Muhammadur Rasul Allah)
Tarawih	Congregational night prayers performed in Ramadan
Tasbih	Rosary bead
Tayammum	Ritual dry ablution used in the absence of water or where it is inadvisable to use water
Thana	To recite: Subhanak Allahumma wa bihamdika wa tabarak asmuka wa ta'ala jadduka wa la ilaha ghayruk
Wajib	Religiously obligatory
Qiraat	Recitation of the Qur'an

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