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Guidelines

EID Milad-Un-Nabi (PBUH) Processions and Gatherings During COVID19

Objective

To provide guidelines to the local authorities, organizers and participants of Eid Milad-un-Nabi (PBUH) (mass gathering) for planning and preparing the events while ensuring minimum risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Rationale

In the context of COVID-19, mass gatherings are events that could amplify the transmission of the virus. The Eid Milad-un-Nabi (PBUH) and other religious gatherings/congregations during COVID 19 epidemic should be organized while taking care of the precautions and SOPs pertaining to gatherings to avoid the chances of spread.

Eid Milad-un-Nabi (PBUH) is celebrated on 12th of Islamic month of Rabi-ul-Awal every year to mark birth anniversary of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhamad Mustafa (PBUH). The celebrations start from 1st Rabi-ul-Awal and last till 12 Rabi-ul-Awal. Mehfil-e-Milad, Serat Conferences and Processions are organized particularly on 11th and 12th Rabi-ul-Awal with large participations of masses.

General Consideration

- The size of the Eid Milad-un-Nabi (PBUH) gatherings should be determined based on local safety regulations under the guidance of local health authorities, while keeping view of the local transmission of the infection.
- A direct link and channels of communication between event organizers, health authorities, local authorities, religious leader and other relevant stakeholders should be established.
- All individuals with COVID-19 symptoms, contacts of COVID-19 cases during their period of quarantine and those with high risk of mortality (older individuals, persons with diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and chronic chest conditions) **should not attend** the Mehfil-e-Milad/Procession.



Guidance for Seerat conference and Mehfil-e- Milad

- Prioritize outdoor Seerat Conferences and Mehfil-e- Milad, if this is not possible, ensure that the indoor venue has adequate ventilation.
- Air conditioners must not be used in the closed halls. If portable ventilation equipment like fans are used, take steps to minimize air from them blowing from one person directly at another person to reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses
- The religious scholar (**Ulema, Sana Khuan and Naat Khuan**) must only be allowed to address the gatherings after having the **COVID19 test** and confirmed as negative.
- **Social Distancing /Physical Barriers;**
 - Mehfil-e- Milad and congregation activities should have seating capacity of 6 feet apart
 - Use of loud speakers should be carried out at the occasion/congregation site so that people may hear the biography, life history of Prophet Mustafa (PBUH) and Naat Khuani while maintaining the social distancing.
 - Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that individuals remain at least 6 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g., guides for creating one-way routes)
 - Pulpit (Minbar) must be at 6 feet distance from the audience.
- **Mandatory thermal scanning** and symptomatic screening of all individuals at the entry points
- **Health desks** be established to help segregate symptomatic individuals; those with signs of cough, flu / fever must not be permitted to enter
- **Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette, Cloth Face Coverings/Face masks;** should be mandatory
- for all, throughout the sessions, with availability of masks and sanitizers / hand washing arrangements at entrance by organizing committees / event organizers.
- **Capacity of the venues** should be ascertained according to social distancing protocols of 6 feet apart and number of participants exceeding the established capacity should not be permitted.
- **Avoid crowding at the entry and exit**
- Mehfil-e-Milad and Seerat sessions where SOPs cannot be effectively implemented such as homes and private gatherings should be discouraged.
- Elderly *people > 65-year age, children, co-morbid and contacts of the COVID 19 person in last 14 days may be sensitized to attend* Seerat conferences and Mehfil-e-Milad on internet or virtually
- Keep the duration of the event to a minimum and **avoid Lengthy activity** to limit contact among participants.
- Food should be distributed in **pre-packaged boxes** with availability of disposable utensils.
- Ensuring **Cleaning and washing** of floor before and after the sessions including disinfection of commonly touched surfaces.
- **Sign posting and Messages** in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances, in restrooms) that promote everyday protective measures in different local languages.
- **Cohorting the participants to ensure** that participants and groupings are as static as possible, by having the same group of the participants from the same districts



- Encourage participants to perform their *ritual ablutions at home* before attending the prayers, Mehfil-e-Milad or procession.
- Ask attendees to bring their own personal prayer rugs to place over carpets for prayers.
- When attendees enter a site or building barefoot, shoes and sandals should be placed separately and in bags.

Guidance for 12 Rabi-ul-Awal Procession

Establishing direct links and channels of communication between Procession organizers, health authorities, local authorities, religious leaders and other relevant stakeholders. For the Rabi-ul-Awal traditional procession, religious leaders and communities should take the responsible steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19 transmission and ensure that accurate information is shared with communities regarding preventive measure for COVID19 and address the misinformation.

- ***Rabi-ul-Awal traditional procession should*** adhere to proper COVID-19 standard operating procedures/ protocols.
- ***Mandatory masks wearing for all participants.*** The participation without masks should not to be permitted.
- Availability / use of ***sanitizers at multiple spots*** during procession.
- Possible maintaining of ***social distance*** during procession. Regulate the number and flow of people entering, attending, and departing from procession to ensure safe distancing of 6 feet (2 meters) at all times.
- Children, older adults >65 years age and people of any age with underlying medical conditions i.e. (Hypertension, diabetes, chronic Bronchitis etc.) should be sensitized to stay at home.
- Multiple symptomatic screening desks should be ensured at the point of origin for the symptomatic screening of all the participants of the processions
- If any procession participant is having symptoms of COVID 19 or contact of COVID positive person in last 14 days, should not be allowed to attend the procession.
- Participants with signs of cough, flu / fever should not be permitted to attend the procession.
- Encourage greeting among people with friendly words, rather than handshakes or other forms of physical contact.
- Number of ***participants should be kept reasonable*** with reduced procession timings. Focus should be on ***essential activities*** and avoidance of prolonged activities / extended procession duration.
- The procession must not be allowed to stop at narrow spaces. The stop points must be predetermined and ensured to be wide open spaces with ventilation mechanism in place.
- Participants unable to attend the in-person procession, can participate through distance, live streaming, and video technologies.
- Services of the trained the scouts/ volunteers or administrators from the procession organizers should be availed for checking the temperature through thermal guns, identifying the symptoms of COVID19, facilitating the processions in rows maintaining 2 meters between individuals and probe



information from suspected individuals. Also, they should update and distribute timely and accurate emergency communication information with the organizers or the focal person of health care authority

- In case attendees, organizing staff and/or scouts develop symptoms during the event, event organizers should liaise with national and local health authorities to facilitate sharing of information.
- **Signs/posters** should be used in the prominent places to guide the participants for following SoPs and maintaining health social distancing of 6feet
- Consider using individual **pre-packaged boxes/servings** of religious or ceremonial foods/sweets, rather than shared portions from communal containers/meals.
- Participants are advised to bring their own water bottles to **avoid drinking at the communal places** with shared cups. Disposable cups should be used at the points of water containers.

Maintaining Healthy Operations

Procession/Mehfil-e-Milad organizers should consider implementing several strategies to maintain healthy operations.

Regulatory Awareness

- The event authorities should be aware of the Federal or Provincial regulatory policies related to group gatherings.
- The participants from other countries should follow the standered guidelines for the travellers before attending the Event

Designated COVID-19 Point of Contact

- The designated point of contact to keep abreast of local “sentinel” testing protocols and coordinate with public health authorities for this purpose.
- Designated administrator of the Mehfil-e-Milad/Procession will be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and contact and collaborate with the local health authorities as needed
- The administrators are advised to retain the names and contact details of all participants for at least one month. This will help public health authorities to contact trace people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 or if one or more members become ill shortly after the event.
- Designated quarantine place for the symptomatic people to stay separated from the normal health individuals and tested for confirmation.

Testing needed

Procession participants may be recommended for an onsite COVID-19 test, in consultation with local health officials

- Testing asymptomatic individuals with recent known or suspected exposure to COVID-19.
- Testing individuals with signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19
- Sentinel testing of selected groups of individuals in consultation with local health officials



Note: The above recommendations are being regularly reviewed by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination and will be updated based on the international & national recommendations and best practices.

The Ministry acknowledges the contribution of DR Urooj Aqeel and HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH team to compile these guidelines.

References:

1. World Health Organization. Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19, Interim guidance, April 2020
2. CDC, Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Interim Guidance

For more information, please contact:

HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH, PM National Health Complex, Islamabad

<http://covid.gov.pk/>

<http://nhsrc.gov.pk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NHSRCOfficial>

<http://www.hsa.edu.pk/>

<https://twitter.com/nhsrcofficial>

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