

When is it safe to reopen gurdwaras?

Please follow the advice given by your governments.

Gurdwaras have a responsibility to follow government guidance. Before considering reopening gurdwaras it is important that management committees firstly follow existing government advice on mass gatherings and social distancing to help prevent the transmission of Covid-19 and control the spread of the virus.

One size does not fit all

We must also remember that we have higher risk congregations in gurdwaras than most other places of worship. As BAME (Black, Asian Minority Ethnic) communities and the over 70s are higher risk groups, gurdwaras need to be especially mindful. Many of the congregation who visit gurdwaras are almost always from the BAME community, being predominantly of Punjabi heritage. They also include a larger proportion of the elderly who are likely to have risk factors like diabetes and heart disease.

Other factors to consider

We must also factor in risks associated with the distribution of *langar* and our ability to be able to socially distance in *langar* halls, as well as the darbar hall. This may not be possible in all gurdwaras, due to limited space and it may not be feasible to create one-way systems for queueing as we have seen in supermarkets and in some gurdwaras. The installation of further sinks and facilitates to allow hand washing, and the availability of hand sanitising equipment should also be considered carefully when planning for a phased reopening. We should respect local autonomy in ensuring gurdwaras only open with necessary preparedness.

Specific suggestions to minimise risk from contamination

1. Write to gurdwara members and place notices reminding those wishing to attend for private prayer or services that they must be responsible for their own head covering and that scarves, duppattas or rumals will not be provided.
2. A recommendation that sanitising hand gel is applied as soon as practicable after entering the gurdwara premises. (although we are cognisant some gurdwaras may not want to install alcohol gel dispensers on their premises, it will be their personal decision based on pragmatism and the overriding objective to deal with Covid-19 and safeguard the community).
3. Ensuring adequate hand washing facilities and (or) a supply of sanitising hand gel at convenient points.
4. Disposable paper towels or air dryers that do not have to be operated by touching or the press of a button.
5. Bags or bins to collect disposable paper towels.
6. Reminders that members and visitors walk in the gurdwara to one side without coming in contact with the other worshippers
7. On entering the Darbar Hall, individuals should respect social distancing rules and bow before the Guru Granth Sahib without touching the ground with your head or hands, and then move to a place in the congregation respecting social distancing requirements.

The congregation's health and safety are paramount

We believe gurdwara management committees need to consider the health and safety of the congregation (*sangat*) above and beyond anything else. A phased and managed reopening of gurdwaras in line with government guidance but taking special precautions as mentioned previously is paramount. Although the financial implication of lockdown and the restrictions on gurdwaras is regrettable, this is a secondary issue and should under no circumstances be the primary focus of management committees. **The most important thing is the health and safety of the *sangat*.** Gurdwaras that choose to compromise on this may well be held accountable.

[Ends]

Disclaimer: This document is advice for gurdwaras rather than strict guidance and should be treated as such. All gurdwara management committees ultimately have a duty of care to the congregation, they must follow government guidance and we recommend they also consider our advice carefully in looking to the safety and well-being of the congregation.