

Letter

RAMADAN FASTING AND COVID-19 TESTING: LESSONS LEARNT FROM 2020

PANDEMIC VERSUS FAITH

Ayuno de Ramadán y pruebas covid-19: Lecciones aprendidas de 2020

Pandemia versus fe

PRAKASH GYANDEV GONDODE 

Department of Anaesthesiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Nagpur, India.

GITESH SAWATKAR 

Department of Dermatology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Nagpur, India.

FATEMA KAMAL 

Department of Pathology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Nagpur, India.

AMRUSHA RAIPURE 

Department of Anaesthesiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Nagpur, India.

SANDEEP DABHEKAR 

Department of Otolaryngology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Nagpur, India.

Corresponding Author: Dr Prakash Gyandev Gondode

*Address: 207- Diamond, Second Floor, ShivBrighton Township, near Government Engineering College Nagpur,
Punarvasan, Wardha Road, Nagpur- 441108, Maharashtra, India.*

E-mail – drprakash777@gmail.com

Receipt: 16/03/2021
Acceptance: 22/03/2021

We would like to share our experience encountered in nasopharyngeal sample collection process in a quarantine centre during Ramadan fasting. The challenges faced, ethical conundrum and probable solutions.

For COVID-19 diagnosis, naso-and/or oropharynx swabs (NOS) are preferred clinical samples, involves inserting a minitip swab with a flexible shaft via nostril up to the nasopharynx. Swab is left in place for several seconds to absorb secretions and then slowly removed. (Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention, 2019). During this process chances are that saliva and oro-pharyngeal secretions generated, being get swallowed by the subject.

When our team of health care workers (HCW) visited a quarantine centre, for collecting NOS for Covid-19 testing during Ramadan fasting, few people were apprehensive and reluctant for the sample collection procedure. Sceptical that a swab being inserted in nose and throat, may break their fasting (Rozah), compromising their practise in faith. Rozah involves strict abstinence from any form of food and water, wherein even swallowing saliva is considered a breach.

The onerous moral dilemma that the people experienced, trying to weigh their social responsibilities against their religious traditions was unprecedented. As much as they intended to not be a hindrance in playing their parts to control the pandemic, they have been devout adherents of their religious practices. The conundrum was as arduous for the HCW. Faith and religion are extremely personal choices and a basic human right. As much as we respect that, the importance of early testing in an ongoing pandemic couldn't be undermined.

Our suggestions:

- Public can be made aware of the fatwas issued by the religious bodies, that testing won't break the fast. (Khaleej Times, 2020 Apr 21; Times Now Digital. 2020 April 28) Aid of local religious teacher can be considered, to disseminate the information.
- Few minutes spent in explaining the importance of early testing, can be of vital value.
- If some people are still trepidatious, sample collection may be considered at evening, when the fast is over. This will invite more compliance. Also, by doing this the problem of dry mucus membranes during fasting can be obviated.
- The option of saliva testing should be explored, as suggested by recent studies, and goes well with people who are fasting (To KK *et al.*, 2020)

Our suggestions can help henceforth, to strike a balance between protecting human rights, respecting religious sentiments and assuring better compliance with the testing, with a boost in trust towards the administrative policies.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC. Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html> (Accessed 8 March 2021)
- Darul Uloom Deoband issues fatwa, says COVID-19 test has no impact on Roza. Times Now Digital. 2020 April 28. Available from: <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/darul-uloom-deoband-issues-fatwa-says-covid-test-has-no-impact-on-roza/584033> (Accessed 8 March 2021)
- To KK *et al.*, Consistent Detection of 2019 Novel Coronavirus in Saliva. *Clin Infect Dis.* 2020;71(15):841-843. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaa149>
- Will a Covid-19 coronavirus test break your Ramadan fast? Fatwa council responds. Web Report. Khaleej Times. 2020 Apr 21. Available from: <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/coronavirus-pandemic/coronavirus-test-will-not-break-your-ramadan-fast-says-uae-fatwa-council> (Accessed 8 March 2021)