

April 12<sup>th</sup> 2020

## **Guidelines for General Practitioners & Private Physicians During Covid-19 Pandemic**

### **Objective:**

*In the current Corona pandemic where social restrictions are likely to continue rendering closure of clinics impractical for longer periods. For general practitioners and private physicians, personal safety vs provision of medical care creates a dilemma. Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA) has prepared the following guidelines with a balanced and careful approach on how to continue the practices and observe infection control simultaneously. These are based on guidelines of WHO and other professional societies and takes account of local norms.*

*We maintain that every doctor is free to adopt an approach he/she thinks is better than this one. We encourage every Muslim doctor and other believers, to revive their faith in Allah swt and remember that He will help those who help others, and stay in the field wherever possible.*

### **Introduction:**

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that more cases of COVID-19 are likely to be confirmed worldwide, leading to a recommendation against gatherings of 10 persons or more. On April 3, 2020, it issued a recommendation that the general public, even those without symptoms, should wear face covering in public settings where social-distancing measures are difficult to maintain in order to abate the spread of COVID-19.

**Who is at High Risk of Contracting Covid-19:**

Individuals at high risk of infection include:

- 1) Persons in areas with ongoing local transmission
- 2) Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19
- 3) Close contacts of infected persons
- 4) Travelers returning from locations where local spread has been reported.

**Who is at High Risk of Complications:**

The CDC has also provided recommendations for individuals who are at high risk of COVID-19–related complications which includes

- 1) Older adults
- 2) Persons who have serious underlying health conditions (e.g. heart disease, diabetes, lung disease).
  - Such individuals should consider the following precautions:
  - Avoid close contact with sick people.
  - Frequent hands washing.
  - Stay home as much as possible in areas where COVID-19 is spreading.

**Features of Covid-19 infection:**

Common symptoms are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Myalgia
- Fatigue
- Anosmia (Questionable)

Less-common symptoms include:

- Headache
- Sputum production
- Diarrhea
- Malaise
- Shortness of breath/dyspnea
- Respiratory distress

**General Advices for patients:**

- 1) Patients who do not require emergency care may better contact their doctor over the phone.
- 2) Spend minimum required time outside home including the clinic
- 3) Adult patient should be encouraged to come alone at clinic. In case of child or disabled, only one attendant should accompany.

**Precautions to be taken by General Practitioners/ Private Physicians:**

- 1) Consider your own health first; doctors of older age (above 60 years) or having above mentioned co-morbidities, better close their practice for the time being
- 2) They may provide health care advises by telephone or Whatsapp

**Precautions at Clinics:****Start every act with the name of Allah**

**\*\* Attending a patient with suspected COVID-19:** is not recommended at general out patients. Such patients are ideally referred to a health care facility designated for their care. In case of unexpected or unavoidable contact in a healthcare facility, the following measures are recommended:

- 1) The patient should be dealt with in a separate room for minimum possible time
- 2) The patient should wear a surgical mask.
- 3) The healthcare persons should wear gloves, N-95 masks, and eye protection.
- 4) Other standard contact and airborne precautions should be observed by the patient e.g. hand washing, covering face with tissue or elbow when coughing, etc.
- 5) The doctor and other clinic staff should contact the nearest Covid-19 referral center for their screening; protocols may vary according to guidelines and estimation of exposure.

**\*\* General Clinics with minimal chances of attending Covid-19 patients:**

*These recommendations take into consideration that in an epidemic, many asymptomatic persons or patients with problems other than respiratory, may be carriers of Covid-19. Hence in an unavoidable community interaction, universal precaution is needed for all.*

**Responsibilities of Clinic Assistant:**

- 1) Avoid crowding at clinic; limit number of patients in the clinic according to its size & dimension; arrange seating with empty seats in between, to maintain distancing.
- 2) If possible, filter suspected patients at point of entry by an assistant with suspected symptoms specially dyspnea, or h/o contact with a Covid 19 patient in last 14 days.
- 3) Ensure that everybody present in clinic is wearing a surgical mask including patient, doctor & all the staff; put notice or announce about wearing a mask and covering nose & mouth with tissue or handkerchief.
- 4) Hand hygiene: Ensure availability of hand sanitizer, or soap & water, in the clinic and encourage its use by everyone.
- 5) General care of clinic:
  - a) Use of disposable sheets is recommended for examination couch
  - b) All surfaces should be frequently disinfected with 20% bleach solution or chlorinated solution (500 mg/L)
  - c) The doctor's room & patient waiting area should be well ventilated

**Precautions by Doctors:**

- 1) Hands hygiene: wash with soap initially and with sanitizer repeatedly esp. after touching the patient.
- 2) Maintain a distance of one meter with the patient while not examining him/her.
- 3) Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed at general clinics, considering there is minimal chance of contact with Covid 19 patients, for doctors as well as assistants:
  - a) Disposable surgical mask: for routine clinics (N95 masks are recommended only in Covid-19 isolation wards or ICU).



- b) Latex disposable gloves: during touching patients, or for minor procedures including IV injections
- c) Impermeable, preferably non-woven, disposable sterile gowns: for minor procedures only. (If using reusable gowns, wash them properly with common detergent after use daily)
- d) Goggles/eye shields: where splash of liquids is expected
- 4) Wear scrubs or separate clothing during clinics is preferable
- 5) Avoid close contact with patient wherever possible. Where chest auscultation is required, auscultate from back rather than front wherever possible
- 6) Clean diaphragm of stethoscope with alcohol swab or sanitizer after every use
- 7) Extra care should be practiced while examining nose or throat; using face shield may be preferable; similarly use disposable tongue depressors rather than metallic
- 8) Avoid using Nebulizers or other aerosol generating procedures e.g. suction, in the clinic. Coughing patients should be strictly advised to cover their mouth.
- 9) Any suspected patient with Covid suspicion should be referred to designated screening centers

#### **Things to do after the clinic:**

- 1) Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or sanitizer
- 2) Cleaning of all surfaces including floor & furniture with 20% bleach solution or chlorinated solution (500 mg/L). (An easy method is to mix one part of bleach with 9 parts of water)
- 3) Separating washable linen & clothes: collect, wearing disposable gloves, in a bag for cleaning. These can be disinfected by washing thoroughly with household detergent & dried under sunlight.
- 4) On reaching home: general precautions should be adopted, such as removing shoes outside main door; putting clinic clothes in a separate container for washing; and washing hands and taking bath before mixing with family members.

It is expected that with use of recommended and sensible approach, the practitioner will protect himself as well as carry on his/her usual duties. May Allah help us all Ameen.