

Dear faith leaders

Updated advice on collective worship and faith-based education

Following the government's lockdown announcement in early January, we wrote to all faith communities in Lancashire to encourage closures of places of worship and a suspension of congregational prayer. Whilst there was not a directive to faith institutions to close, it was strongly advised.

We want to thank you for your leadership throughout the pandemic: making your faith centres Covid-secure, offering support for testing and encouraging your communities to get vaccinated. We appreciate that many have made real sacrifices by pausing collective worship over the past year and are grateful as this has helped protect the people of Lancashire.

As we have seen sustained reductions in Covid-19 cases and transmission rates across Lancashire, combined with reductions in hospitalisations and deaths and large uptake of the vaccine, we can now advise that by maintaining Covid safe practices, collective worship and congregational prayer can resume from **Monday 8th March**.

The Department for Education has issued guidance that requires faith-based education, such as madrasahs, to continue online until 12 April at the earliest. This advice is the same for other out-of-school settings such as scouting and guiding groups and extracurricular clubs.

You can find more information about this at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak#who-can-attend>

Gathering outside faith settings

Additional care and attention needs to be given to ensure people do not socialise or meet and greet before or after prayers. We have had reports that whilst standards are maintained inside places of worship, the situation outside is of concern. Please urge your worshippers to respect the rules before and after services.

Here's how you can help

Lancashire's Covid-19 rates are falling. Here is how you can continue to help keep up this positive momentum:

Review Covid safe arrangements and risk assessment

Worshippers with symptoms or those who are close contacts of anyone with Covid should not attend faith settings. If you need any advice or guidance on updating risk assessments and introducing new measures you can get in touch with us on:

- **Blackburn with Darwen** – publicprotection@blackburn.gov.uk
- **Blackpool** - publichealth@blackpool.gov.uk
- **Lancashire County Council** - Abdul.Razaq@lancashire.gov.uk

Vaccinations

Please encourage everyone in your community to have the vaccine. The vaccine is suitable for Muslims under halal conditions, and contains no animal products so is also suitable for vegetarians and vegans.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect ourselves and our loved ones against Coronavirus. When it's your time to be vaccinated, you will receive a letter from your GP. Please take up the offer and be a part of the NHS's largest ever vaccine roll-out programme.

Testing

Rapid testing for people without symptoms is available at testing hubs where you don't need an appointment. You can find more information about this at <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/coronavirus-updates/mass-testing-in-your-community/>

There are numerous community testing hubs across Lancashire for people with or without symptoms. If you have symptoms, you can book a test at <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>

We appreciate that these are difficult times. We are grateful for all your help and we want to thank you for your co-operation and support.

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