



**NASMDA**

North American  
Sikh Medical and Dental  
Association

## Updated Recommendations for Gurdwaras, Sevadars and Sangat

To re-open amid the current pandemic from SARS CoV-2 and COVID-19. Updated 5-25-2020.

Disclosure: The information provided in this document is based on the CDC and other local Guidance for places of worship and has been adapted for Gurdwaras. It aims to be consistent with the Sikh community and Gurdwara traditions, while respecting the health and safety of the sangat. This document is supported by numerous Sikh community health care professionals, NASMDA, and several community based organizations. These recommendations are meant to be suggestions or guidance to be applied to divans, special occasions (i.e. Gurpurab, Weddings, Funerals etc.) and educational events. Still, every Gurdwara will need to assess the involved risks and its capacity to implement the recommendations.

### 1. PROGRAMMING:

- a. Schedule Divan and Gurdwara activities keeping in mind social distancing, masking, and hand hygiene policies.
- b. Virtual and/or recorded programs should continue to be offered. [Vulnerable \(bit.ly/extracautio\)](https://bit.ly/extracautio) populations should consider only attending virtual divans.
- c. Postpone or cancel all large gatherings such as Gurpurabs, Samagams, Nagar Kirtans, Weddings, etc.
- d. Continue to provide sangat with virtual counseling, spiritual/emotional care, and refer to outside resources as needed.

### 2. BE CONSISTENT WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FROM LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT:

- a. Follow any local/regional recommendations regarding re-opening.
- b. Monitor frequently for up to date numbers, clusters, outbreaks, and other local issues.
- c. Consider designating a formal liaison from the Gurdwara management with the local health department, who can help update the local sangat and the Gurdwara management.

### 3. EDUCATE MANAGEMENT, EMPLOYEES, SEVADARS and SANGAT: Train all in the safety actions as per local requirements and have back up available.

- a. Consider conducting safety training virtually; if in-person, ensure that social distancing is maintained.
- b. Designate individual(s) to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Please have their contact information readily available to connect with Sangat and announced on the Gurdwara notice boards and digital screens.
- c. Post physical distancing and hygiene flyers and/or play [videos in English and Punjabi](https://nasmda.org/index.php/videos/) (http://nasmda.org/index.php/videos/) throughout the Gurdwara on:
  - i. How to properly place and remove face cover and gloves.
  - ii. How to properly wash or sanitize hands and maintain distancing (no hugs or handshakes,etc).
- d. If a member of Sangat is diagnosed with COVID-19:
  - i. Refer to the CDC or other National and/or local health agency guide on [How to respond to COVID-19](https://bit.ly/gurdwarasrespond) (bit.ly/gurdwarasrespond).
  - ii. Encourage diagnosed Sangat members to inform the Gurdwara management, and assure confidentiality.
  - iii. Notify Sangat of potential exposure, per local guidelines, and liaise with public health.
  - iv. Help reduce [stigma](https://bit.ly/gurdwarastigma) (bit.ly/gurdwarastigma) and discrimination.

4. **ENTERING THE GURDWARA:** A sevadaar should be present to provide guidance to the entering sangat and answer any questions at the main entrance.
  - a. Encourage sangat/staff members who are unwell to stay home and if feeling unwell, they should return to their home.
  - b. Encourage sangat/staff members to wear a mask.
  - c. If possible, have one main entrance and exit for the Gurdwara while maintaining emergency exits.
  - d. Post and provide [Symptoms of Coronavirus](https://bit.ly/coronasyptoms) ([bit.ly/coronasyptoms](https://bit.ly/coronasyptoms)), [self-screening](#) list and/or [visitor questionnaire](#) to visiting sangat
  - e. Institute temperature and other symptoms screening depending on your local health guidance.
5. **WEAR FACE COVERING:** Everyone older than 2 years old is encouraged to wear a face covering/mask/hazooria to cover the nose and mouth.
  - a. All sangat should provide their own face and head covering. No one should leave used items at the Gurdwara. Gurdwara should not collect these, but if left behind, should be disposed of or [laundered](#) using your local health guidance.
  - b. Any adult or child who is unable to follow physical distancing and face covering instructions should consider attending virtual divan only.
  - c. A mask/face covering and disposable gloves should be offered to those who may not have access.
6. **MAKE CLEANLINESS AND HYGIENE A PRIORITY:** Ensure regular cleaning after each divan/service. [Clean and disinfect](#) ([bit.ly/gurdwaraclean](https://bit.ly/gurdwaraclean)), including transit areas and high-touch/shared surfaces (e.g. tables, chairs, door knobs, bathrooms, microphones, rail handles).
  - a. Encourage all to greet with folded hands; avoid hugs, hand-shaking or any other physical contact.
  - b. Provide easy access to water and soap for all to wash hands before entering Darbar Hall and before serving langar or parshaad.
  - c. Provide sufficient tissues, touchless trash cans and hand sanitizer stations that are easily accessible and conveniently located throughout the facility.
  - d. Wash with soap and water all fabrics around Guru Granth Sahib that could have been touched.
  - e. Wash and change hazooria/rumaals daily. Put them in the laundry right away and do not hang on hooks.
  - f. Consider no-contact Matha Tek at the Sukhasan to avoid multiple people touching.
  - g. Do not use phone or touch personal items such as wallet, keys, purses, etc while doing Seva.
  - h. Do not share kirtan instruments. If not possible, wash/sanitize hands before and after use.
  - i. Do not share Gutkas. Encourage sangat to bring their own gutka or download Gurbani apps.
  - j. Consider improving air circulation by either holding a divan outside or opening windows/doors as able. Some Gurdwaras may consider installing an appropriate air filtration system.
7. **LIMIT OCCUPANCY TO MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING THROUGHOUT THE GURDWARA:**
  - a. Stagger divans, even consider shortening the duration to allow more sangat to attend.
  - b. Ideas for limiting occupancy include: online sign-up, manual counting and limiting the time of stay in the divan hall.
  - c. Communal gathering of Sangat for socialization before, after, or during divan should be discouraged.
  - d. Ideally, traffic in/out of the divan/langar should be one-way with a different entry and exit points.
  - e. Only allow Parkarma of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji if 6 feet distance can be maintained from those doing Chaur Seva and 12 feet from those doing Kirtan Seva.
  - f. Have families who live in the same household sit together.
  - g. For attendees from separate households, have markings that are at least 6 feet apart in the entrance for no-contact Matha Tek and divan/langar hall for sitting.
  - h. Appoint Sevadars to direct Sangat in high traffic areas to maintain physical distancing including in elevators, parking lots, bathrooms, kitchen areas etc.
8. **LANGAR AND PARSHAAD (DEGH)**
  - a. Consider keeping langar open only for food pantry seva and for those in need.

- b. Consider using serving utensils or wearing disposable gloves to prepare or distribute parshad and langar. Wash hands before putting on gloves.
- c. Use sneeze guards to protect parshad and food from contamination.
- d. Discontinue self serve and either:
  - i. Consider pre-packed or plated options for langar and parshad
  - ii. Have designated individuals serve.
- e. If serving Langar, keep items to a minimum ([maintaining safety during preparation and serving](#)).
  - i. Ensure physical distancing measures (6 feet distance, one-way traffic, minimize occupancy, etc).
  - ii. Ask sangat not to face each other, minimizing face-to-face contact.

**9. FINANCIAL AND FOOD DONATIONS:**

- a. Set up virtual, wired, electronic or by mail methods of financial contribution.
- b. Ask sangat to bring only exact change for donations for the golak. Try not to exchange bills/coins.
- c. Wear gloves to handle golak only using the minimum number of people needed.
- d. Discourage sangat from bringing food donations into the Divan hall. Instead, direct them to a pre-designated area where the staff can properly receive and clean the items.

**10. KHALSA SCHOOL/GURBANI/KIRTAN CLASSES:** Refer to your local health guidance for [educational \(bit.ly/gurdwarakids\)](#) programs.

- a. Encourage virtual lessons/sessions and utilize sources of Sikh online education such as SikhRI, Sikh Gurmat Academy, Basics of Sikhi, Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji Academy, etc.
- b. Adjust times and change frequency to minimize numbers of sangat at once.

**11. SANGAT:**

- a. Stay at home if you are sick.
- b. Consult with your primary health care provider regarding your specific medical risks, and if it is safe for you to attend in-person divan. [Extra caution \(bit.ly/extracaution\)](#) | [What you can do \(bit.ly/highrisktips\)](#).
- c. Wash hands before entering the gurdwara and before any seva. Wash or sanitize hands frequently.
- d. Maintain physical distancing at all times and encourage all to wear a mask or face covering. Employ touch-less greetings (folded hands or head nod). Avoid hand shakes, hugs, etc.
- e. Children should be supervised and with an adult at all times.
- f. If unable to follow local Gurdwara safety measures, one should consider attending virtual divan.
- g. Do not share musical instruments; if not possible, wash/sanitize hands before and after use.
- h. Bring your own gutka or use phone/tablet apps.
- i. Bring your own water bottle in the case drinking water fountains are turned off, based on local guidance.
- j. While at the Gurdwara, know how to contact the Gurdwara designated person for a COVID-19 concern.
- k. If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, please inform the Gurdwara management. They can keep your identity confidential while taking the necessary steps to protect the sangat.

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References and additional reading: [White House Guidance \(bit.ly/whguidance\)](#) | [Community and Faith Based Organizations \(bit.ly/3ecPBLX\)](#) | [Funeral Guidance \(bit.ly/gurdwarafuneral\)](#) | [Reduce Stigma \(bit.ly/gurdwarastigma\)](#) | [FAQs \(bit.ly/gurdwarafaq\)](#) | [Contributors \(bit.ly/shwteam\)](#) | [Extended families \(bit.ly/largefamilytips\)](#) | [NY Reopening Guidance \(bit.ly/nyreopen\)](#) | [California Guidance \(bit.ly/careopen\)](#)