**Pandemic Vs Faith**

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), due to SARS-CoV-2 as pandemic, which began in December 2019 in Wuhan, China.[1]

The outbreak of Covid-19 has so far halted many religious rites and ceremonies. Congregational prayers have been suspended and shrines have been closed. Now the important month of Ramadan has also started during which Muslims around the world observe fast. This is called as Sawn, Siyam, Ruzeh or Rozah depending upon different regions around the globe.

For the diagnosis of COVID-19, the clinical samples commonly preferred are naso- and/or oropharynx swabs (NOS) swabs more over other specimens. Process of NOS collection involves inserting a minitip swab with a flexible shaft (wire or plastic) through the nostril upto the nasopharynx. Swab is left in place for several seconds to absorb secretions and then slowly removed. [2] During this process, there are chances that the saliva and oro- pharyngeal secretions generated, being get swallowed by the subject. We would like to share our experience encountered during sample collection process.

**Our Experience:**

A team of health care workers (HCW) visited a quarantine centre in central India, for collecting NOS for Covid-19 testing. While taking swabs, in the early month of May 2020, which also coincides with the Islamic month of Ramadan, some people were reluctant for the sample collection procedure, and some were apprehensive.

When enquired, the reason found was that few people at quarantine centres were following rozah (fasting). This involves strict abstinence from any form of food and water, wherein even swallowing saliva is considered a breech. These people were sceptical that a swab is being inserted in throat, and that may break their fast, compromising their practise in faith. Many were unaware of the fatwas issued by many religious bodies, that the covid-19 testing doesn’t break the fast of Ramadan. [3], [4]

**Our suggestions:**

* Public can be made aware of the fatwas issued by the religious bodies, that testing won’t break the fast.
* For creating awareness help of local religious teacher can be taken, to disseminate the information.
* Few minutes spent in explaining the importance of early testing, can be of vital value.
* The idea of getting tested is a service to the nation and mankind has to be incorporated in the minds of the people.
* Inspite of the above efforts, if some people are still trepidatious, sample collection may be considered after evening, when the fast is over. This is likely to invite more compliance from people. Also, the dry mucus membranes during daytime in the event of fast, another difficulty faced by the HCW, can be obviated.
* As recent studies have shown the option of saliva testing for covid-19, this option can be explored as it goes well with people who are fasting. [5]

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 under the looming shadow of this growing pandemic couldn’t be undermined in any way.

We hope the suggestions made can help 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:**

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