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# THE SIKH NETWORK

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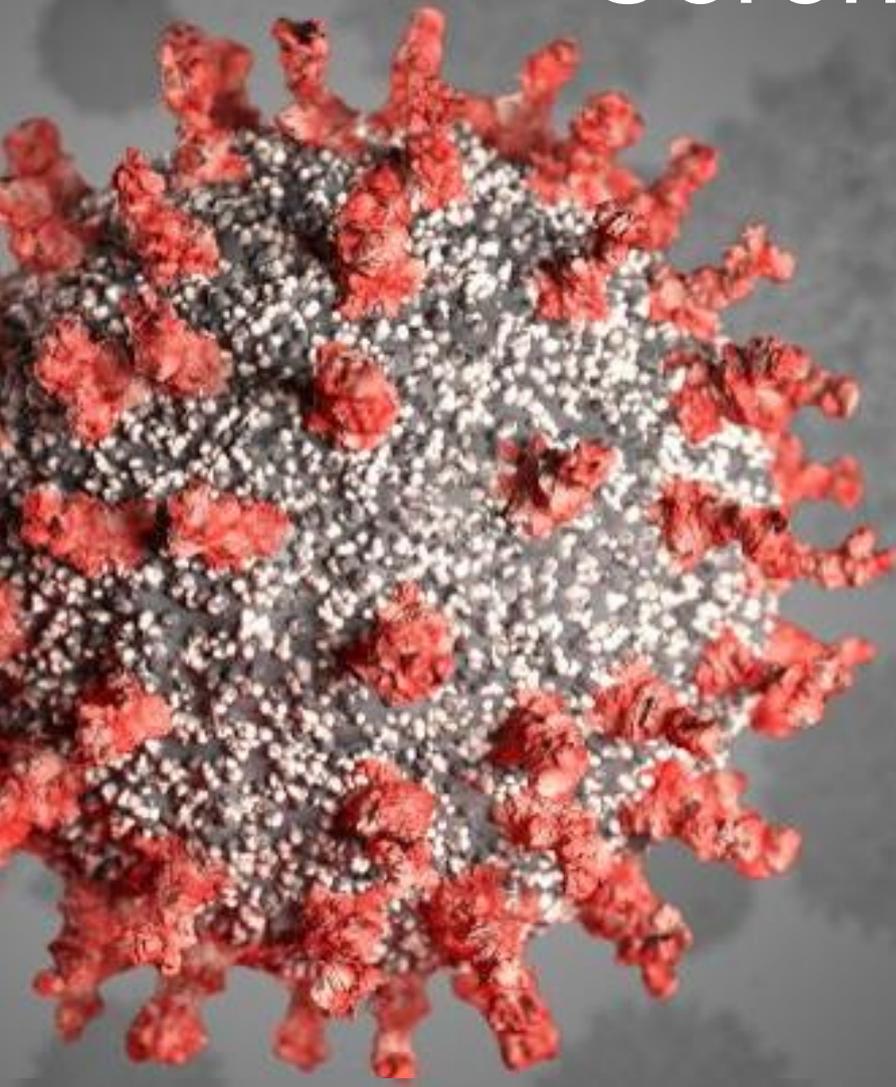
Connecting & representing Sikhs around the Sikh Manifesto & UK Sikh Survey



## COVID-19 Coronavirus

Impact on the UK  
Sikh Community

Survey Report  
2020



## BRITISH SIKHS: COVID-19 SURVEY

The Government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, infamously predicted a “good outcome” for the UK would be if the death toll from COVID-19 remained under 20,000.

Extraordinary efforts have been made by NHS and social care workers, but official figures reveal nearly 35,000 people have lost their lives having tested positive for COVID-19. Some suggest this official number will be close to 40,000 by the end of the month.

People have made huge sacrifices by putting their lives on hold and distanced themselves from friends and family during the lockdown or the numbers could have been far worse.

The Sikh community has suffered more than most not only in terms of deaths from Covid-19 but also from the enforced restrictions on Gurdwaras that are central to the Sikh way of life. Gurdwaras are much more regularly visited by Sikhs and very different to many other places of worship that have a narrower role.

The government claims to have made the right decisions at the right time, based on the science. The Sikh Network has conducted a survey after the government published its' COVID-19 recovery strategy on Monday 11 May 2020.

The survey has had 1,553 responses and some of the results on the government handling of the pandemic are stark and critical in a wide range of areas. Many respondents have provided free text comments and a selection are re-produced below to give qualitative information supporting the statistics.

### UK Government's initial response to Covid-19

**92%** of the respondents do not think the UK Government acted quickly enough to tackle the pandemic. The percentages vary between 98% for the over 70s to 88% for the under 30s.

*A woman in her 40s from the East Midlands said: “I've lost two elderly family members to Covid-19 and I am convinced they might still be alive if the government had taken coronavirus more seriously early on and taken action much sooner, by sharing guidance and advice for those most vulnerable.”*

### Availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) for key workers

**88%** of those working in the NHS or social care sectors stated they were very unsatisfied with the availability of PPE. 9% of the respondents to the survey are employed in the NHS or social care sectors.

*A man in his 30s from the West Midlands working in the NHS said: “I feel NHS workers are putting their lives at risk every day, due to the incompetence of the Government. They knew months earlier the UK would be hit by a pandemic and did too little, too late. I have lost two colleagues; three children have lost their mother and two their father. We keep hearing government is basing decisions on science. What science told them frontline NHS staff would be safe not having the right PPE at the right time. If these fundamental mistakes were made elsewhere heads would already have rolled. This is nothing less than corporate manslaughter.”*

**85%** of those working in the NHS and social care sectors and those with immediate family members working in these sectors reported COVID-19 had created unbearable strains within the family due to a combination of lack of testing, availability of proper PPE, high proportion of BAME deaths and the constant need to be ultra-cautious not to spread the disease to loved ones.

***A nurse in her 50s from London said:*** “This terrible situation was putting real strains on family life. I work on the COVID-19 wards and I’ve decided I can’t risk passing on the disease to my mother-in-law who has a serious health condition. For the last 8 weeks I’ve isolated myself from my husband, children and the extended family in a local hotel at my own expense. However, I’m getting really depressed with the daily trauma and then the isolation, I do not know how long I can continue like this.”

### High proportion of BAME deaths of those working in the NHS and social care sectors

**93%** of those working in the NHS responded to confirm BAME staff were being deliberately selected ahead of non-BAME staff to work on COVID-19 wards.

***A nurse in her 20s from the West Midlands said:*** “Many working in the NHS have not been surprised at the high proportion of BAME deaths in the NHS. At my hospital BAME staff especially those in junior or support roles have been pressurised and targeted to work on COVID-19 wards ahead of other colleagues, this should not have been allowed to take place.”

### High proportion of Sikh deaths from Covid-19

**96%** of all respondents said they were very concerned with the high proportion of Sikh deaths from Covid-19. Other data being collected locally from Gurdwaras and Sikh funeral directors by the Sikh Network suggests the total number of Sikh deaths has more than doubled since the first COVID-19 deaths reported in March 2020. This is approximately **twice the national average**.

***Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP said:*** “I have sadly lost three members of my family to Covid-19. I am deeply concerned with the disproportionate number of BAME deaths and the complete lack of any official data on Sikh deaths from Covid-19.”

### Testing and contact tracing

**88%** of those working in the NHS or social care sectors stated they were very unhappy with the UK’s testing strategy with many referring to the delay in being tested, the time it has been taking to get results and data issues with missing results.

***A woman in her 30s from the South East working in a social care home said:*** “Testing has been a complete shamble. Months into the pandemic there can be no excuses for not having the capacity to have tested all NHS and social care staff. Care homes have been forgotten about until it’s proved too late. By turning a blind eye, they have ignored the risk to our lives and those in the social care setting. The social care sector has been devastated as we have unfortunately had far too many deaths. I have been working on the front line since day one, but have still not been tested”

**94%** of all respondents believe we have not done enough on testing that is fundamental to an effective contact tracing system.

*A senior lecturer said: "Easing the lockdown without an effective contact tracing system in place could prove catastrophic. I fear we have jumped the gun and the messaging from the PM this week that has forced mainly blue-collar workers to return to work could mean the sacrifices made in the 8-week lockdown are lost if we see the number of COVID-19 cases rise in the next few weeks. For some blue-collar workers, especially in London where it is impossible to avoid using public transport and crowded scenes where it is impossible to observe social distancing are a recipe for disaster without contact tracing."*

## Total lack of consultation on restrictions imposed on Gurdwaras

**98%** of all respondents were extremely unhappy that government did not consult Sikh organisations working with Gurdwaras before forcing them to close their doors to the public. 95% stated the government totally failed to appreciate the significance of Gurdwaras to the Sikh way of life. 32% of those that responded stated they visited the Gurdwara on a daily basis and a further 41% at least once a week before the lockdown.

**1 million** free meals prepared and distributed by Gurdwaras during the lockdown.

It is estimated over 100 Gurdwaras have opened their doors to volunteers to prepare and distribute food to those most vulnerable and NHS frontline workers. Free meals have been prepared and distributed to around 120,000 every week or over 1 million meals since the lockdown.

*Jatinder Singh, the Secretary General of the Sikh Council UK said: "The decision to force Gurdwaras to completely close to the public other than to small numbers for funeral prayers and volunteers was understandable, but disappointing. However, the 8-week lockdown period should have been used by government to work with Sikh organisations and Management Committees of Gurdwaras to prepare them to safely open with social distancing. However, what we have is places of worship being earmarked to open last alongside pubs and restaurants. This is totally unacceptable and shows a complete disrespect to places of worship and those that regularly use them, many on a daily basis."*

## Unwillingness of government to issue funeral guidance specific to each faith

**86%** of respondents stated the government has been negligent by not issuing funeral guidance specific to each faith. Many suggested this had created huge problems for bereaved families as too much was left up to discretion for different places of worship, the guidance for families handling the bodies of COVID-19 victims was deliberately left vague putting lives at risk and much of this was done for reasons of political correctness.

*A 30-year old man from the West Midlands said: "I lost my father to COVID-19 and believe he might still be with us if the guidance for funeral arrangements was far stricter. The government guidance was only to strongly advice families not to have contact with a COVID-19 body rather than state only professionals with full PPE should have contact. I understand the government adopted this approach to give flexibility to faiths that believe family members must bathe the dead body. This is not essential for Sikhs so why has the flexible guidance applying to all faiths risked people's lives."*

## Treatment of British Sikhs stranded in Punjab, India

**9 out of 10** Sikhs stated the Foreign and Commonwealth Office did far too little to support tens of thousands of British Sikhs stranded in Punjab. Many of those stranded were elderly and vulnerable and some stated they were abandoned without medication. They were treated like second class citizens and those that have lived in the UK for over 50 years and permanently resident in the UK but chosen not to take British nationality were treated worse.

**A man commenting on his family from the East Midlands said:** “Both my parents, who are in their 70’s were left stranded in India for over 7 weeks. They were due to return home at the end of March, but all flights were cancelled with little notice. We received little or no help from the Foreign Office, the only help was from Labour Sikh MP Tan Dhesi. My parents were extremely stressed and unwell as they had run out of their essential medication. I feel our government neglected their own citizens and took way too long to bring them home.”

## Government’s failure to engage with Sikh organisations connected with Gurdwaras on their re-opening

**95%** of respondents stated government has failed to properly engage with Sikh organisations connected with Gurdwaras on their re-opening.

**Narinderjit Singh, General Secretary of the Sikh Federation (UK) said:** “The Faith Minister has chosen not to engage with any Sikh organisations connected to Gurdwaras during the Covid-19 crisis. Instead he has met individuals from the Sikh community that have no or little direct contact with Gurdwaras. Not surprisingly most of them have advised Gurdwaras should remain closed. Last Friday the government set up a new Places of Worship Taskforce and lost all credibility by appointing a so-called Sikh faith leader who is not a practising Sikh, is from a controversial organisation that is often critical of Gurdwaras and to make matters worse his deputy has recently been charged of criminal activities of perpetrating hate towards Sikh representatives.

We now expect Sikh organisations connected with Gurdwaras and leading Gurdwaras to give an ultimatum in the coming days to government to properly engage or Gurdwaras will break ranks and prepare to open earlier than pubs and restaurants. Gurdwaras are already open to volunteers and their numbers will be gradually increased while adhering to social distancing so Gurdwaras can open safely to limited numbers of the public.

**91%** of respondents said they were very comfortable or comfortable with re-opening Sikh Gurdwara to the public with the appropriate social distancing and safety measures.

**A woman in her 50s from the North East said:** “Gurdwaras must open with social distancing as soon as possible. If I can go to the shops and must go to work why is the government still stopping me from going to the Gurdwara on my way to work to pay my respects and seek guidance from Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. This can be done safely at my Gurdwara that has excellent facilities and small numbers in attendance. I’ve been visiting the Gurdwara on a daily basis for nearly 30 years and this is the longest period I have been prevented by the government from meeting and obtaining direction from my Guru.”

# THE SIKH NETWORK

Producers of;

## THE SIKH MANIFESTO

&

## THE UK SIKH SURVEY



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