

Opinion

Risk of Zoonotic Transmission of COVID-19 during Eid-Ul-Fitr in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Eid-ul-Fitr is an auspicious festival that is expected to celebrate by millions of Muslims across the world including Pakistan by the end of April. The Delta variant of COVID-19 is way more harmful than any other variants. The spread of virus still remains very high in large festival gatherings like Eid ul Fitr instead of strictly following SOPs. The mass migration of people across the country during festival is of main concern that leads to increase spread of virus. It is imperative that government officials along with community leaders, religious scholars and health authorities should take part in mitigating risks of virus transmission with serious measures. As general public is not much aware of the COVID-19 complications, it becomes significant to educate illiterate people through various approaches like to give them awareness about virus, its symptoms, preventive measures and significance of vaccination. Communication in their local language that is easily comprehensible and in persuasive way greatly impacts the public and empowers them to adapt healthy behavior that helps to mitigate the risk of virus transmission.

Keywords: Eid-ul-Fitr, COVID-19, Transmission

Eid-ul-Fitr, is a significant religious festival is expected to celebrate in the end of April, by millions of Muslims all over the country. It marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, during which Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. Eid-ul-Fitr is a time of joy, festivities, and social gatherings, with families coming together to celebrate the occasion. However, amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional way of celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr in Pakistan poses a significant risk of corona virus (COVID-19) transmission, which is a matter of great concern.

Sever acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus2 (SARS-CoV-2) is also labeled as “COVID-19” and Pakistan has been grappling with this pandemic since early 2020. The SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant (B.1.617.2) was designated a VOC by the WHO in May 2021 because of its enhanced transmissibility, especially in areas where the percentage of people who have been fully vaccinated.⁽¹⁾ The country has experienced waves of infections, and the healthcare system has been stretched thin in many regions. Despite efforts by the government and healthcare authorities to implement preventive

measures, such as mask-wearing, social distancing, and vaccination campaigns, the risk of virus transmission remains high, especially during large gatherings like Eid-ul-Fitr.

One of the main concerns during Eid-ul-Fitr is the increased movement of people. Many Pakistanis travel to their hometowns or visit relatives in different cities to celebrate the festival. This mass migration of people can lead to the spread of the virus from high-prevalence areas to low-prevalence areas or vice versa, contributing to the rapid spread of the disease. Moreover, crowded public transportation, such as buses and trains, can also become hotspots for virus transmission, as physical distancing becomes challenging to maintain. During Eid-ul-Fitr, large gatherings are common, including family gatherings, community events, and public gatherings at parks, markets, and mosques. Many families prepare lavish meals and invite guests to their homes, which can lead to close contact and increase the chances of virus transmission. Sharing of utensils, serving spoons, and food can also be potential sources of virus spread. These gatherings often involve close contact, hugging, and handshaking, which can increase the risk of virus transmission. In addition, many people do not wear masks during such gatherings, and which further increase the risk of respiratory droplet transmission.^(2,3)

The conclusions extracted from past experiences of SARS-CoV statistics during festivals like Eid-ul-Fitr, we believe that SOPs set by WHO for COVID-19 should be strictly followed during celebrations, and immediate measures must be taken to avoid serious consequences during Eid-ul-Fitr. In light of these concerns, it is imperative that the Pakistani government, along with community leaders, religious scholars, and healthcare authorities, take proactive measures to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission during Eid-ul-Fitr. These measures may include:

1. Public health campaigns: Conducting comprehensive public health campaigns to raise awareness about the risks of COVID-19 transmission during Eid-ul-Fitr and promoting preventive measures, such as mask-wearing, hand hygiene, and social distancing.⁽⁷⁾

2. Regulation of gatherings: Implementing regulations and guidelines on the size and nature of gatherings during Eid-ul-Fitr, including limitations on the number of attendees, enforcing mask-wearing and social distancing, and encouraging outdoor gatherings instead of indoor ones.⁽⁸⁾

3. Travel restrictions: Implementing travel restrictions or screening measures.^(4, 5)

As general public is not much aware of COVID-19 outcomes, raising awareness about COVID-19 among the illiterate population in Pakistan is crucial to mitigate the spread of the virus. It is imperative to employ innovative and inclusive approaches to disseminate information about the virus, its symptoms, preventive measures, and the importance of vaccination. Utilizing culturally relevant and accessible communication channels, such as community-based outreach programs, local influencers, and audio-visual aids, can facilitate comprehension and knowledge retention among the illiterate population. Customized messaging that resonates with their socio-cultural context, combined with empathetic and persuasive language, can empower this vulnerable group to adopt behavior changes that protect themselves and their communities from the ravages of the pandemic.^(6,9)

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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