

Infectious Diseases: Prevention and Control in Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the solution of Infectious Diseases/Pandemics in a comprehensive way from an Islamic Perspective. It is obvious that Medical science and especially the health sciences have solid and long-termed research and working cure for these deadly killer diseases but the question raised that whether the religion is dealing with them or not. And there isn't any ruling or guidance in religions rather than Islam that describes the health issues and presents their precautionary measures and control. Problem with the world from early ages till this day is a series of diseases especially the infectious ones. Being a Muslim I must have faith in the perfection of Islam. Its rulings are for every aspect of life from the individual to spiritual and social aspects to financial and international levels. For the details of each of them, it needs more than sufficient time and space both to cover them but here we're going for a comprehensive discussion about guidelines of Islam for Infectious Diseases. It starts with the prohibition of Allah from harming someone himself to avoid the gathering of infected people in times of pandemic.

Keywords: *Islamic teachings, infections, pandemics, faith*

Introduction

The record of human suffering and death caused by smallpox, cholera, typhus, dysentery, malaria and other common diseases establishes the eminence of the infectious diseases. Despite the outstanding successes in control afforded by improved sanitation, immunization, and antimicrobial therapy, the infectious diseases continue to be a common and significant problem of modern medicine. The most common disease of mankind, the common cold, is an infectious disease, as is the next level feared modern disease AIDS and COVID-19.

Medical science has a large effort to maintain human's health physically as well as mentally. Most dangerous kind of diseases we're facing in this era is called, "***Infectious Diseases***". This kind of diseases are a challenge for recent world medical science as many people die every year, not because they don't have approach to the medication but they are unaware of these diseases, their harm, symptoms, early checkup, danger zone and ways of later cure.

Having awareness to prevent infectious diseases, indeed we need to know the initials of diseases generally and infectious diseases specifically.

Islam, with its two basic sources; Quran and Hadith, presents an important example of preventing infectious diseases. Allah says:

"وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ"

"And do not kill yourselves ".¹

It's a comprehensive statement about saving ourselves from every harming thing. With the passage of time Medical science has developed higher level cures as well as defined how to prevent them but it is fact that many of infectious diseases are discover in last two centuries but the holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ informed us about them 1400 years back.

Common example is leprosy, According to *Dr. Khalid Ghaznavi* the causative agent of leprosy, *M. leprae*, was discovered by *G. H. Armauer Hansen* in Norway in 1873, while the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ not only told this but explained the precautions also as He said:

"فَرِّ مِنَ الْمَجْدُومِ كَمَا تَفِرُّ مِنَ الْأَسَدِ"²

"Run away from the leper as one runs away from a lion."

Keeping oneself safe himself from leprosy virus is prescribed in this narration that is to not gather with infected person because its infection may danger other. In other narration He ﷺ prohibited people to go where Plague is spread as He (ﷺ) said:

"إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ بِالطَّاعُونِ بِأَرْضٍ فَلَا تَدْخُلُوهَا، وَإِذَا وَقَعَ بِأَرْضٍ وَأَنْتُمْ بِهَا فَلَا تَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا"³

"If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; but if the plague breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place."

It clearly conveys the message to bind the infections so they could not reach the healthy. We know that Dengue spreads by infected water when a mosquito produces virus in it. It usually breaks out in standing water. Now go 1400 years back and see when the holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

"وَأَوْكِ سِقَاءَكَ، وَاذْكُرِ اسْمَ اللَّهِ، وَحَمِّرِ إِنَاءَكَ، وَاذْكُرِ اسْمَ اللَّهِ"⁴

"And cover tight your utensils and remember the name of Allah, and cover your utensil (with piece of cloth) and remember the name of Allah"

And prohibited his followers to pass urine in standing water⁵ and under the trees because this is to spoil our resources and that could be in use of people and Islam forbids us to do so. These are the characteristic of Islam that it deals with every issue of human's life. It is the purpose of this research to bring out the rules of Islam regarding Infectious Diseases besides Medical science, then

collaborate between both and prevent the danger of these diseases.

Research Question:

- Is the Religion playing its role to prevent infectious diseases?
- Can we prevent infectious diseases by applying both Religion and Medical science in our lives?
- Is the Medical science sufficient to prevent the infectious diseases?
- Has the Religion set any specific rules to prevent infectious diseases specifically?

Literature Review:

Randy Shilts in his award-winning 1987 book '*And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*' mentions the first five years of AIDS in America as a drama of national failure and a tale bearing telling. While *Steven Johnson* in his book '*The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic — and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World*,' told that in August 1854, many poor Londoners suddenly took sick and began dying. Their symptoms included upset stomach, vomiting, gut cramps, diarrhea and racking thirst. Whatever the cause, it was fast to kill and fast in spreading to new victims. New Yorker author *Richard Preston* did set out to tell the story of the deadly new viruses that appeared to be emerging from Africa's rain forests, which was EBOLA in his book '*The Hot Zone: The Terrifying True Story of the Origins of the Ebola Virus*'.

Another deadliest pandemic called 'INFLUENZA' came upon the earth in the autumn of 1918, when the war in Europe was almost over as mentioned in the book 'Flu: The Story Of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It,' by *Gina Kolata*.

After mentioning some good books about deadliest historic pandemics, here is to say that individually and principally infectious diseases with Islamic point of view is explained in some cases in '*Tibb-e-Nabvi aor jadeed science*' by *Dr. Khalid Ghaznavi* in Urdu language. There he brought a brief collection of many infectious diseases, their causes, symptoms and cure in medical and Islamic perspective.

Not all but many of them are covered there but here in this study the medical researchers are explained widely. Not only the diseases but the cures, precautions and general recommendations are brought down. Islamic guide lines as hygiene, environmental preservation and spiritual health care isn't covered individually in specific sections or chapters.

Meanwhile in many of medical science's the cure and medication is explained but Islamic perspective is missing which was the main focus to be done. *Parikshit Sanyal* in his '*Community Medicine, A Students Manual*'(2015)d every kind of medicine and vaccine is covered in a great manner along with causes and preventive methods.

Definition of Infectious Disease:

*"Infectious Disease in medicine is a process caused by an agent, often a type of microorganism that impairs a person's health. In many cases, infectious disease can be spread from person to person, either directly (e.g., via skin contact) or indirectly (e.g., via contaminated food or water)."*⁶

Discussion:

1. What is an infectious disease and how it spreads?

According to the definition, it is a process of travelling a dangerous agent which can be any virus or bacteria from an infected or ill to healthy being. This agent can travel direct sometimes without any further agent and indirect through any further helping agent.

2. How Islam Deals with Infectious Diseases?

• Person to person:

The very first guide line of Islam comes in Quranic verse:

"وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ" ⁷

"And do not kill yourselves"

It's cleared not to harm your selves whether it is any physical issue or spiritual. Physical harm comes with many situations like providing your body with bad diet, lack of sleep, insufficient movement/exercise, mistreating your body with harmful activities such as wrong postures in movements and picking ups, masturbation and closing to the ill/ infected person or community while the mental health can be harmed by holding bad and negative behaviors and being treated with negativity. If we check the mentioned verse, we can easily understand that harming ourselves in any aspect or level is prohibited in the religious scripture. This is all what today's medical science tells us while we were invited to this direction for 14 centuries back.

Wearing mask, observing social distance, washing hands for a sufficient time and avoiding crowds are the lessons derived from this verse in a common sense.

• Animal to Person:

"عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: أَعْلِقُوا الْأَبْوَابَ، وَأَوَكُوا السَّقَاءَ، وَأَكْفُوا الْإِنَاءَ، وَحَمَرُوا الْإِنَاءَ، وَأَطْفُوا الْمُصْبَاحَ، فَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَا يَفْتَحُ غَلَقًا، وَلَا يَجُلُّ وَكَاءً، وَلَا يَكْشِفُ إِنَاءً، وَإِنَّ الْفُؤَيْسِقَةَ تُضْرِمُ عَلَى النَّاسِ بَيْتَهُمْ" ⁸

"Jabir ibn 'Abdullah reported that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Lock the doors, tie the water-skins, turn

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over the vessels, cover the vessels, and put out the lamps. Shaytan does not open a locked door, nor untie a water-skin, nor uncover a vessel. A mouse can cause a house to burn down with its inhabitants inside it."

A rat or a mouse isn't only cause of burning a fire into house but proved reason of deadly infectious disease- *PLAGUE*. Whether the mouse enters the house and infects any uncovered food or bites you and cause this infection travels to you or other animal. So the Prophet guided to keep the things covered and another narration it is permission to kill mouse as it entered the house of Prophet and tried harming Him.

While in medical science, *Dr. Julianne Farrell* mentions:

*"The main method of control for mice in agricultural as well as urban settings is with poison baits (rodenticides). Integrated pest management (IPM) techniques—which give more effective, long-term control—combine baiting with trapping, habitat manipulation, reducing food availability and removing refuge habitat."*⁹

- **Mother to Unborn Child**

Many infectious diseases including the STDs¹⁰ travel from person to person, they can be transmitted to unborn child from infected mother.

For Islam has settled a best law for an amazing moral society, so Islam prohibited adultery and unsafe sexual activities which can be out of legal marriage boundaries.

"وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزَّوْجَ إِذْهُ كَانَ فَحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا"¹¹

"Do not go near adultery. It is truly a shameful deed and an evil way."

- **Contact with Soil:**

*"A human diseases resulting from any pathogen or parasite, transmission of which can occur from the soil, even in the absence of other infectious individuals"*¹²

It contacts with environmental preservation. Everything in existence is for the benefit of human being, while if anything gets changed from its natural way, it can defiantly be harmful. Surely, it appears sometimes in the outbreak of infectious that can be transmitted to the healthy from infected and makes the environment sick.

For preservation of environment, there are many rulings from Quran and Hadith. For example:

- i. The Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم forbade us from urinating in stagnant water, and forbade its use, so that diseases of this water are not transmitted to humans who use this water in multi functions, saying:

"لَا يَبُولَنَّ أَحَدُكُمْ فِي الْمَاءِ الدَّائِمِ"¹³

"Do not any of you urinate in the permanent/stagnant water."

- ii. The Messenger of Allah guided us to clean our houses and keep them clear of dirt for Allah loves the clean people and we should clean our lawns and houses as well as the streets:

"إِمَاطَةُ الْأَذَى عَنِ الطَّرِيقِ صَدَقَةٌ"¹⁴

"Removing something harmful from the path/road is charity".

- **Droplets**

The spray of droplets during coughing and sneezing can spread an infectious disease. You can even infect another person through droplets created when you speak. Since droplets fall to the ground within a few feet, this type of transmission requires close proximity.

Now let's turn to the guidelines of Islam to deal with the droplets of infectious diseases.

Airborne Diseases

You can catch some diseases simply by breathing. These are called airborne diseases.

Airborne disease can spread when people with certain infections cough, sneeze, or talk, spewing nasal and throat secretions into the air. Some viruses or bacteria take flight and hang in the air or land on other people or surfaces.

When you breathe in airborne pathogenic organisms, they take up residence inside you. You can also pick up germs when you touch a surface that harbors them, and then touch your own eyes, nose, or mouth.

Because these diseases travel in the air, they're hard to control. Keep reading to learn more about the common types of airborne diseases and what you can do to protect yourself from catching them.

Some Common Airborne Diseases

- The common cold
- Influenza
- Chickenpox
- Mumps
- Measles
- Whooping cough (pertussis)
- Tuberculosis (TB)
- Diphtheria

Symptoms

Airborne diseases usually result in one or more of these symptoms:

“inflammation of your nose, throat, sinuses, or lungs, coughing, sneezing, congestion, runny nose, sore throat, swollen glands, headache, body aches, loss of appetite, fever, fatigue”

Treatment for common airborne diseases

For most airborne diseases, you’ll need plenty of rest and fluids. Further treatment depends on your specific illness.

Some airborne diseases, such as chickenpox, have no targeted treatment. However, medications and other supportive care can help relieve symptoms.

Some, such as the flu, can be treated with antiviral drugs.

Treatment for infants with whooping cough can include antibiotics, and hospitalization is often needed.

There are drugs to treat and cure TB, although some strains of TB are drug resistant. Failure to complete the course of medicine can lead to drug resistance and return of symptoms.

If caught early enough, diphtheria can be successfully treated with antitoxins and antibiotics.

COVID-19

A rapidly spreading coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, and the disease it causes, COVID-19, has been responsible for millions of infections and hundreds of thousands of deaths globally in 2020. Information on coronavirus and COVID-19 is constantly being updated as a result.

While the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is not generally considered to be airborne, there may be some situations in which the virus can act like an airborne disease. These include certain clinical settings in which people are receiving intensive medical treatment. In usual situations, SARS-CoV-2 is spread through respiratory droplets after a person coughs or sneezes, but these droplets are larger than what is considered airborne.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, fatigue, and shortness of breath. If you experience these symptoms, see a doctor immediately.

The very first and foremost thing to observe is social distance to keep oneself away from the virus of any infection that drops from any infected person’s mouth during breathing, coughing or sneezing.

Precautionary Measures and Control Strategies

According to Covid Website of Government of Pakistan there are ways to prevent the disease:¹⁵

- Use Face Masks When In Closed and Crowded Places
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues.
- **Avoid Crowd:** As an individual, you can lower your risk of infection by reducing your rate of contact with other people. Avoiding public spaces and unnecessary social gatherings, especially events with large numbers of people or crowds, will lower the chance that you will be exposed to the coronavirus as well as to other infectious diseases like flu.
- **Hand Hygiene:** Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- **Sick People:** Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness.

Islamic Perspective:

1. Using Mask and Covering the Mouth

Mask is to cover your mouth and save your breathing in form virus in the air or from people closed to you in sitting or talking, while this can be any piece of cloth or safe covering whether a cotton mask of highly certified medical mask.

Heading back to traditions of our beloved Prophet, and seeing that how He prescribed us safety measures for the safe breathing and controlling our lungs and respiratory from infections to get in through our breathes.

"عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ إِذَا عَطَسَ غَطَّى وَجْهَهُ بِيَدِهِ أَوْ بِثَوْبِهِ وَعَصَّ بِهَا صَوْتَهُ"¹⁶

"Abu Hurairah narrated that when the Prophet (ﷺ) would sneeze, he would cover his face with his hand or with his garment, and muffle the sound with it."

Sneezing is an unconditional way of droplets which can contain disease or the viruses of infections. The Prophet used to tell all the traditions of Him in a practical way so the followers could not have any contradiction between the sayings and the practices of him at all. Additionally he guided to lower the voice during sneezing which is a sign of good manners. It is also called sneezing on elbow or tissue in these pandemic days.

Another way that can spread infections is breathing in the meal or drinks, so it is prohibited to breathe in the utensil. Prophet (ﷺ) said:

"إِذَا شَرِبَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلَا يَتَنَفَّسْ فِي الْإِنَاءِ"¹⁷

"Whenever anyone of you drinks water, he should not breathe in the drinking utensil."

Breathing in the water during drinking it was among the teachings of our Prophet pbuh as doing it is declared as an act not liked by the Prophet termed 'Makrooh'. If we follow according to the saying of Prophet it means we are following an act of *Sunnah* and for what we will be awarded.

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He set many rules as *Sunnahs*, which are proved as medical precautionary measures today in the world of medical science and research field. Breathing while drinking may cause many diseases that are caused by droplets of breathe i.e. flu and cough to most dangerous infectious diseases of today; Covid-19.

And He also said to breathe thrice when drinking water but not to breathe inside the glass or other utensil. Why?

The reasons are obvious and clear as per the medical researches like the viruses and bacteria of different infectious diseases can spread through breathing so easily and quickly. Here are some examples of respiratory track.

2. Washing Hands Occasionally

Washing hands occasionally is a tradition or Sunnah that is proved in many narrations of Prophet like before and after eating as well as after getting up from sleep although the hands are clean when waking up. The Prophet said:

" إِذَا اسْتَيْقَظَ أَحَدُكُمْ مِنْ نَوْمِهِ فَلَا يَدْخُلْ يَدَهُ فِي الْإِنَاءِ حَتَّى يَغْسِلَهَا " ¹⁸

"When anyone of you wakes up from sleep, he should not put his hand into the vessel until he has washed it."

It isn't important that whether the hands are dirty or not to wash them as said by the Prophet but the important is personal hygiene. That's why the Prophet guided to wash hands when waking up whether this waking up is in morning or any day time.

3. Avoiding the People with Infection

It is not against faith and trust in Allah to avoid people with infectious diseases or the pandemic area. The Prophet pbuh prohibited the healthy and well person to meet infected one or travel to infected with pandemic area.

• Avoiding Infected Person

" عَنْ عَمْرِو بْنِ الشَّرِيدِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، قَالَ كَانَ فِي وَفْدِ ثَقِيفٍ رَجُلٌ مَجْدُومٌ فَأَرْسَلَ إِلَيْهِ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " ¹⁹
إِنَّا قَدْ بَايَعْنَاكَ فَارْجِعْ "

"Amr b. Sharid reported on the authority of his father that there was in the delegation of Thaqif a leper. Allah's Apostle (ﷺ) sent a message to him: "We have accepted your allegiance, so you may go."

This is how He had dealt with a person coming to visit Him for spiritual purpose but He had not compromised on health and settled down a law for all of the followers.

• Avoiding Infected Area

The narration about avoiding infected areas due to infectious diseases is mentioned above in which the Prophet pbuh guided us not to go to pandemic

areas. This is for reasons: first one is to stay safe and the second one is to keep others safe by not bringing the virus back to healthy place.

Conclusion:

Main point was to find out whether Religion is playing its role in preventing infectious diseases or not? Regarding Islamic rulings there were some valid precautions and directions to be followed for prevention and controlling of infectious diseases as below:

- Keeping personal and public hygiene in strict way, so that the germs and infections couldn't attack. Although they attack but cleanliness will be a protector against them.
- In personal self-care it comes personal hygiene which includes clipping nails, shaving armpits and pubic hair most often to prevent infections attack people. So we saw that Islam is the only religion that deals with diseases as well as infectious ones.
- Preventing infectious diseases by applying both Religion and Medical science in our lives:
- Yes, indeed we can prevent them by applying both Religion and Medical in our lives. It's been defined in dissertation Religion has a special concern with dealing of these diseases as per following rulings:
- Islam orders the preservation of human hygiene which is essential tool of preventing infections in both ways.
- It orders the preservation of the environment which is about saving our resources as a Muslim as well as a Human.
- Islam forbids each activity and human relation that causes the transfer of disease which is generally called the STD's and the rules to prevent these dangerous diseases.
- Islam encourages the followers to maintain a good health which is possible with good immune system and balanced diet.
- It helps the human's health by quarantine the patients and to encircle the infectious diseases. While the Medical Science is also isolating the infected person and community to stay at its own area so that the infections could not spread to healthy people.



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