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**U.S. NEWS** 03/13/2020 05:45 am ET

# Coronavirus Forces Mosques To Reassess Weekly Prayers And Ramadan Plans

With Ramadan only a month and a half away, Muslim Americans are having to rethink everything from Friday prayers to planning Hajj.



By Rowaida Abdelaziz

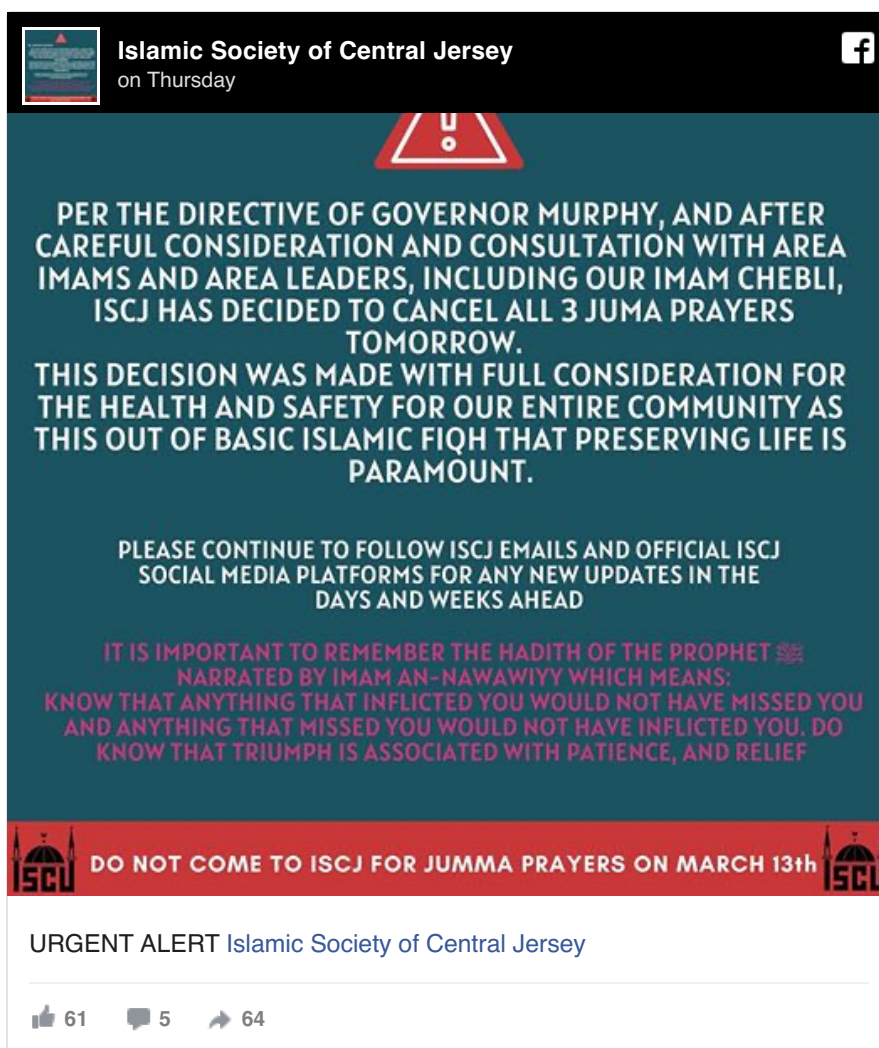


Every week, nearly a thousand people head to the Muslim Association of Puget Sound, the largest mosque in Washington state, to pray, socialize and learn together. Last week, the mosque leadership did something it had never previously done in its 14 years of existence: It suspended Friday congregational prayers, a weekly service required for adult Muslim men and a time dedicated for all attendees to worship and catch up with their fellow community members.

The suspension was in response to the outbreak of the coronavirus, which has infected nearly 400 people in Washington. The first case reported in the country, which was announced in January, was just miles away from the mosque, in [Snohomish County](#). Since then, the virus has spread through the state and led to at least 30 deaths from COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

With the holy month of Ramadan — a time when worshippers gather every day at their local Islamic centers to participate in communal fast-breaking meals and night prayers — projected to begin on April 23, Muslim American leaders have been forced to reassess their plans, in order to protect their congregants during the outbreak.

Mosques across the country have sent bulletins to their members, urging worshippers to employ best practices when attending congregational prayers. Imams told congregants to bring their own prayer rugs and stay home if they are ill, and have also canceled extracurricular programming. Islamic schools shifted classes to remote sessions. American Muslims who were set to leave for Saudi Arabia for the umrah pilgrimage also had to cancel those trips.



The image shows a Facebook post from the Islamic Society of Central Jersey. The post features a dark teal background with white and pink text. At the top, there is a warning sign icon. The main text is centered and reads: "PER THE DIRECTIVE OF GOVERNOR MURPHY, AND AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION AND CONSULTATION WITH AREA IMAMS AND AREA LEADERS, INCLUDING OUR IMAM CHEBLI, ISCJ HAS DECIDED TO CANCEL ALL 3 JUMA PRAYERS TOMORROW. THIS DECISION WAS MADE WITH FULL CONSIDERATION FOR THE HEALTH AND SAFETY FOR OUR ENTIRE COMMUNITY AS THIS OUT OF BASIC ISLAMIC FIQH THAT PRESERVING LIFE IS PARAMOUNT." Below this, it says: "PLEASE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW ISCJ EMAILS AND OFFICIAL ISCJ SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR ANY NEW UPDATES IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS AHEAD". At the bottom of the teal section, there is a pink line of text: "IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THE HADITH OF THE PROPHET ﷺ NARRATED BY IMAM AN-NAWAWIYY WHICH MEANS: KNOW THAT ANYTHING THAT INFLICTED YOU WOULD NOT HAVE MISSED YOU AND ANYTHING THAT MISSED YOU WOULD NOT HAVE INFLICTED YOU. DO KNOW THAT TRIUMPH IS ASSOCIATED WITH PATIENCE, AND RELIEF". The bottom of the post has a red banner with white text: "DO NOT COME TO ISCJ FOR JUMMA PRAYERS ON MARCH 13th". The post is titled "URGENT ALERT Islamic Society of Central Jersey" and has 61 likes, 5 comments, and 64 shares.

**Islamic Society of Central Jersey**  
on Thursday

**PER THE DIRECTIVE OF GOVERNOR MURPHY, AND AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION AND CONSULTATION WITH AREA IMAMS AND AREA LEADERS, INCLUDING OUR IMAM CHEBLI, ISCJ HAS DECIDED TO CANCEL ALL 3 JUMA PRAYERS TOMORROW. THIS DECISION WAS MADE WITH FULL CONSIDERATION FOR THE HEALTH AND SAFETY FOR OUR ENTIRE COMMUNITY AS THIS OUT OF BASIC ISLAMIC FIQH THAT PRESERVING LIFE IS PARAMOUNT.**

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW ISCJ EMAILS AND OFFICIAL ISCJ SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR ANY NEW UPDATES IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS AHEAD**

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**DO NOT COME TO ISCJ FOR JUMMA PRAYERS ON MARCH 13th**

**URGENT ALERT Islamic Society of Central Jersey**

61 5 64

Some mosques, like the Muslim Association of Puget Sound, are shutting down activities in which large groups would gather — a devastating decision for the many worshippers.

“It was so sad seeing our mosque close like that,” said Shamaa Farag, a local substitute teacher and longtime attendee of MAPS. Despite living next to another mosque, Farag always made the 30-minute trip to MAPS at least once a week so her two children could participate in cultural events while she assisted in planning interfaith programs. “We all gathered there for so long,” she added.

The coronavirus has hit pandemic levels, according to the World Health Organization, with 114 countries affected and over 4,000 deaths globally. Since the outbreak, countries have tightened their borders, stock markets have plunged, shelves at supermarkets have been emptied, and individuals have self-quarantined and announced drastic measures in attempts to protect themselves.

Muslim worshippers and Islamic centers are no different. While many American mosques are still debating whether or not to suspend Friday prayers, nearly all of them have called on worshippers to take heed of hygiene precautions prescribed by both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Islamic faith. (Islam requires worshippers to partake in a prewashing before each prayer.)

The Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America, an independent, nonprofit organization of Sunni religious scholars and experts, has encouraged mosque board members to designate areas in prayer halls for those with flu-like symptoms and to instruct ill worshippers to wear masks during prayer.

“We’re going to take this step by step,” said Nihal Khan, the director of religious affairs at the Islamic Center of Connecticut, who has been in and out of meetings with fellow mosque leaders for the last few weeks. The Islamic Center of Connecticut hosts about 500 worshippers each week for Friday prayers, which were suspended for this week as well as its other programming and biweekly potlucks. Khan said there is likely to be more cancellations in the coming days and weeks.

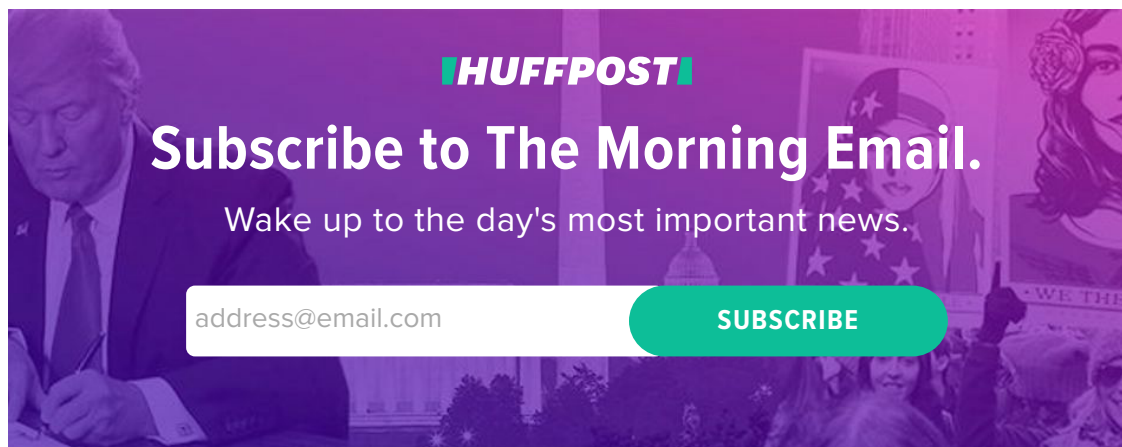
The mosque is also planning to shorten future Friday prayer services, a decision that was not made lightly, due to its religious importance, he added.

If the outbreak doesn’t subside by the start of Ramadan, the mosque will be forced to suspend iftars and nightly prayers, which bring in nearly 300 people a day, said Khan.

At least two mosques in New York — Hillside Islamic Center in New Hyde Park and Masjid

Hamza in North Valley Stream — asked worshippers in an email to bring their own prayer rugs and avoid shaking hands with others. The Islamic Center of New York University discontinued Friday prayers until further notice, in accordance with the university's suspension of large gatherings. The Islamic Center of Central Missouri also announced its suspension of Friday prayers in an email sent to congregants. The Toledo Muslim Community Center in Ohio announced it was shutting down entirely, including daily prayers, Friday service and its Islamic school.

In Chicago, the Muslim Community Center suspended all activities with the exception of prayers and noted that the restrictions are subjected to change. Mosques in Dearborn, Michigan, laid out one-time paper maps on top of the carpets upon which Muslims bow their heads several times in prayer. Islamic schools in New Jersey, including Pillars Academy and Noor Ul Iman School, pivoted to remote learning while one Edison-based weekend school suspended classes entirely. A nearby mosque, the Islamic Center of Central Jersey, also suspended Friday services for the next three weeks.

A promotional banner for HuffPost's morning email. The background is a purple-tinted collage of images including Donald Trump, a woman in a military-style uniform, and a crowd. The text is white and green. At the top center is the 'HUFFPOST' logo. Below it is the headline 'Subscribe to The Morning Email.' followed by the subtext 'Wake up to the day's most important news.' At the bottom left is a white input field containing the placeholder text 'address@email.com'. To the right of the input field is a green rounded rectangular button with the word 'SUBSCRIBE' in white capital letters.

**HUFFPOST**

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ABDEL GHANI BASHIR VIA GETTY IMAGES

Saudi authorities this week suspended the year-round umrah pilgrimage, during which worshippers circle the Kaaba seven times, and also announced the temporary closure of the area around the cube structure.

Outside of the U.S., Saudi officials announced that the country has paused its [visa issuing process](#) and [temporarily barred visitors](#) from the Grand Mosque, (including the Kaaba, the black cube Muslims face for daily prayers that is touched by millions of people every year) so it could be [sterilized](#). It's just months ahead of the annual Hajj season, when millions of Muslims from across the globe are expected to partake in the religious pilgrimage.

The announcement swiftly had a domino effect: In the United States, Muslim American travel agencies were forced to cancel trips set depart this month before the start of Ramadan.

CelebrateMercy, a religious nonprofit that takes American Muslims on a spiritual tour to Jordan, Jerusalem, Mecca and Madina, was set to take 75 people to visit, some of them for their first time. Now they can no longer go.

“As soon as we heard that umrah visas were being suspended, then that was a red flag for us,” Tarek El-Messidi, the founder of CelebrateMercy, told HuffPost about the decision to cancel. His organization was particularly worried about being trapped in another country, saying the outbreak could cause both a medical and a logistical nightmare.

His concerns were soon validated. In addition to Saudi Arabia's announcement, Jordan announced earlier this week it would [partially shut down](#) its border crossings with Israel in

attempts to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Israel also required those citizens who were returning from abroad to enter 14 days of self-quarantine as soon as they arrive. Back home, President Donald Trump announced new travel restrictions, including banning most Europeans from entering the U.S. for 30 days.

Farag, the Washington state mother who attends the Muslim Association of Puget Sound, said although she knew it was the right decision for the mosque to suspend prayers and activities, it's only made her more alarmed.

"I've really started to panic with all the recent news that is coming out. The situation has become horrifying," she said. "I barely leave my house now, if not at all."

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02:51



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**Rowaida Abdelaziz**   
Reporter, HuffPost

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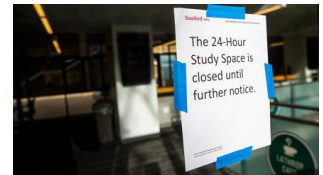
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