

COVID-19 Press Statement

As the number of COVID-19 cases in Pakistan increase, our response to this global pandemic is critical. WHO's aim with COVID-19 response is to identify, isolate and care for patients quickly. This has guided The Aga Khan University (AKU's) response as well.

AKU is a University and a Research led institution. We have collaborations with the World Health Organization, other leading international partners, universities and hospitals, all of which help us act as a credible source for information and advice for the federal and provincial governments and the National Institute of Health. In disease outbreaks, in health policy and related matters, our experts have routinely been called upon to provide expertise and they have always stepped up and provided a leading role whenever our Pakistan society has faced health challenges.

The COVID-19 disease outbreak is no different. When this disease outbreak first surfaced, our experts in Health Sciences, Infectious Diseases, Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine and Clinical Laboratories, among others, went into full-force, supported by our administrative leadership teams, to better understand the virus, epidemiology, patient management protocols and diagnosis.

COVID-19 is a new virus and can currently only be reliably diagnosed through a PCR based technique which requires a swab taken from the nose. Any other technique, such as blood based antibody testing may provide an indirect measure of exposure to the virus but should not be used in isolation and can provide incorrect results; the PCR based technique is the trusted and recommended standard COVID-19 test by the World Health Organization (WHO). While the country-wide COVID-19 response plans were being worked upon, in January 2020, in an attempt to make the COVID-19 PCR test available in Pakistan, the Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi (AKUH, K) Laboratory experts imported certain reagents and equipment, worked on a testing regimen and was able to make a reliable test to diagnose COVID-19. The AKUH,K Clinical Laboratories acts as international reference labs and insists on high quality materials to ensure high levels of test result accuracy, guided by the world class accreditations it has from the Joint Commission International as well as the College of American Pathologists. This was critical at this stage because testing kits were not yet available in Pakistan, so this effort was undertaken to make available the very critical testing ability, that that country did not have at that time.

The Aga Khan University Hospital is a private, not for profit institution that has served the people of Pakistan over the last 35 years, to support the development of quality and relevant Education, Healthcare and Research. The surplus collected by the hospital has always been used to help patients access quality health services through welfare and zakat, and financially challenged students access quality educational programmes through subsidies and aid. However, in the case of the COVID-19 PCR test, the charge of Rs. 7,900 covers only the cost of conducting the test and required reagents; AKUH, K is not profiting from the COVID-19 PCR tests.

The COVID-19 screening, testing and treatment protocol followed by the Aga Khan University Hospital is the same protocol that is being followed world-wide. Screening is a technique used in

medicine to determine the likelihood of a person having a disease. This includes a set of questions which have been designed as per the guidelines set by WHO and at AKUH, screening for COVID-19 is done at the Community Health Centre (CHC), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Due to a shortage of testing kits, tests across Pakistan are only being performed on PUIs or Persons Under Investigation. These are people who meet both the below criteria:

1. Fever, cough and/or respiratory problems
2. Travel history in the last 14 days and/or contact history with a known COVID-19 patient.

Patient who test positive for COVID-19 are being informed by the government about their results and being directed to hospitals admitting COVID-19 cases. In addition to already existing hospitals, this also includes hospitals the government has set up specially to admit and treat COVID-19 cases.

The Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi is a quaternary care hospital. We offer and continue to offer care to patients suffering from all ailments. Given this, we have a limited capacity to admit COVID-19 patients. These patients may need to just be isolated, or may need intensive or critical care. Therefore, AKUH's capacity to admit these patients depends also on the type of care they would need, and our availability for such accommodation.

About The Aga Khan University Hospital

The Aga Khan University Hospital is a not-for-profit healthcare institute that offers all medical services to their patients under one roof. In addition to the quaternary care hospital in Karachi, AKUH has a network of 4 secondary care hospitals, over 30+ Medical Centres, and over 290+ Clinical Laboratories, 20+ Pharmacies in over 120+ cities across Pakistan. It also offers Home Healthcare Services and home deliveries of medicines. The Hospital provides Zakat for those patients who are eligible and the health systems offers generous Patient Welfare to support those in financial need. In recognition of its high quality and patient safety, the AKUH is the accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI) as an Academic Medical Centre and its Clinical Laboratories are accredited by the College of American Pathologists (CAP) for fast and accurate testing.

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