

Fatima's story 23rd June 2020

About me	Household	Spouse	Children	Community and area
Female We're Indian and Muslim	I live with my husband and four children.	My husband works full time for the local council, so he's one of the frontline workers. In terms of pre-existing health conditions, my husband's diabetic.	My son and daughter are both doing engineering apprenticeships. My other daughter and son were at school.	We have lived in [Town] for 23 years. We live within an Asian community which is mainly Indian and Pakistani and the area is all Muslim. It's very populated. You see the same people every single time when you walk out. The schools, the mosque ¹ , the shops are all local. It's important to my husband to be close to the mosque ¹ and he can walk to work.

My life before COVID

In January life was quite normal. Everybody went to school and work at set times and we had the evenings to catch up. Every other day I pop in at my mums, because I drop my son off round the corner from her. We just have a cuppa and then I start my day about 10 o'clock. That seems like years ago now.

We first heard about lockdown through school in mid-January. I think schools in Spain had started to close down. When schools started to tell us about Zoom and Microsoft Teams I don't think I even read it properly because I really didn't think that we were going to be in that situation.

My experience of COVID

"It all boils down to how information is released to everyone. You didn't know at the beginning how bad it was going to be. Lately we're just hearing every single day that people were passing away. I don't feel like life's ever going to be like January anymore."

I started to take it seriously when my eldest daughter got sent home from work in March. Her office had to be deep cleaned as somebody had tested positive for COVID after travelling abroad. Two days later she had a fever, a really bad cough, a high temperature and tiredness. She self-isolated at home but didn't book time off sick as her symptoms were mild. She put it down to being tired and we left it at that. She has been working from home since.

¹ A mosque is a place where people with a Muslim faith gather together to worship. It is also where funerals take place.

My own symptoms started just a few days before Ramadan² (mid-April). For all of Ramadan² I couldn't taste any food at all! But I didn't have any other symptoms. We didn't know much about it at the time so we didn't take it seriously.

After that, my husband had quite a severe fever. He was bed ridden for three days. Quarantining was quite difficult. My daughter stayed in her room, others slept downstairs and we all tried to stay in separate rooms. We were doing every Indian herbal thing that you could think of, like black seed oil. We managed everything from home with painkillers and didn't get tested.

My parent's household experienced COVID more severely than us. They live with my brother, his wife, my sister and two little children. One of my nephew's had cancer. My brother took him to the Children's Hospital in [city] for specialist treatment the first week of Ramadan² and the very next day he wasn't feeling well. One after the other they were all ill. One had a fever, one lost sense of taste, one coughed a lot, but my dad had all of it - he couldn't even walk downstairs. He's got a heart condition and diabetes. When my dad started to have breathing difficulties, they contacted NHS 111 and he had to go into hospital. He wasn't admitted, he just came back home with antibiotics. He'd lost so much weight he was like half a man.

My life after COVID

Our Ramadan² was actually quite good in lockdown, but Eid³ was really difficult. Our in-laws usually have a traditional breakfast, but my sister-in-law's brother passed away from COVID, so it was really sensitive - it would have been a disrespect to my sister-in-law to go for breakfast. If she couldn't go her brother's funeral, it doesn't make sense for us to be hunky-dory with everybody getting together two weeks later.

I've heard of people up the road and down the road passing away and people who are my mum's friends. In terms of lockdown and social distancing, I just thought our lot wouldn't do it properly. But now they are trying to do it as properly as they can, most people are wearing masks, and I think that's driven by their experiences of having lost people.

We've become more withdrawn as a community, my daughter feels more withdrawn at work virtually, and although we're all completely recovered in terms of symptoms, we feel more withdrawn as a family. My dad's shaken up a lot. He's scared that he's still got it and somebody else is going to get it off him. He is still isolating and waiting for an official government thing to say that he can come to my house. Living this way is going to be really hard. Normally when somebody passes away, everybody gets together and sends food to each other and supports each other, but now we probably would ring the immediate family. Even going to the mosque¹, my husband's temperature is taken, and he has to have his own prayer mat, otherwise you're not allowed in. Praying in a mosque¹ in a socially distanced way is not nice at all. People are coming for their own worship just to get out of the house.

² Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this period, people with a Muslim faith abstain from food and drink (fasting).

³ Eid is an important event, which are celebrated by people with a Muslim faith. Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the fasting month. Eid al-Adha (acknowledging prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son).

Why my COVID experience matters

I do feel that if things had locked down a bit sooner, then not so many people would have passed away. We picked up the basic information that they told us; to isolate. But when they said one day we're doing this, one day it's this bubble, and all that mess-up of information, we ignored it. It actually gives you a headache that they just don't know what they're talking about themselves. The information we got through our cousins in London was much more systematic. They seemed really clued up and were almost disgusted that we had still been going to mosques¹. If people are dying then we have our own personal responsibility, so if medical experts are telling 'you can't be here', then you shouldn't be there. As a family we all desperately believe that.

I think localised healthcare needed to be better equipped. Everything we hear from Westminster, we always just think it's generalising. That information should be trickling down to our local councillors so they have to take the responsibility to pass it on. I think information directly from the local council would be taken more seriously. Then again, maybe because we were OK, we didn't access the information as much.