

Ismail and Isha's story 20th July 2020

About me	Household	Other family	Community and area
I am 58 and male. I'm Muslim, Indian Gujarati. I've been a Taxi driver for over 20 years. I moved to the UK in 1979. I'm a diabetic.	I live with my wife, Isha. Isha also moved to the UK when she was young. In my house there's just the two of us and we've got a four-bedroom house.	We have grown up children and two grandchildren who live close by.	We live in an area with nice people, it has a school, mosque ¹ and town. I've lived in the area ever since I was four years old. I don't ever see any kind of prejudices or racism.

Our life before COVID

We used to have family gatherings. My sons and my nephew love all these gatherings, having BBQs every week. The grandkids would come and have a sleepover.

I heard about COVID in January, because my wife is always reading the headlines from Sky News and BBC news. We didn't think it was serious. Before COVID, Isha loved going shopping and going into town. When we heard about the lockdown, she got busy with shopping - rice shopping, flour shopping, everything. There were big queues, prices went up and they've not got any left - flour, rice, meat, nothing. Some people had masks on at that time and some of them had gloves on as well. But I think we seemed to have ignored all that.

Before lockdown people didn't take it that serious - not many people are wearing a mask, even myself. Obviously, I have contact with so many people, I've got the passengers. When I'm picking up passengers from the hospital, then I put my mask on. When so many people had COVID in the community and they were in a very bad situation, then people started wearing a mask and everything.

Our Experience of COVID

"We didn't know at the time that he had COVID. The ambulance came in and I tried to come into the room and they wouldn't let me come in the room, '2 metres apart, 2 metres apart'. So I was in the kitchen all the time, whilst they were checking my husband. They were checking his temperature and oxygen level. That wasn't nice at all. I was depressed, because there's only me in the house, what can you do, I wasn't fit enough either."

It was a Thursday night. I worked that day and I had to deliver some meat at my sister's house in [City]. I delivered the bag outside the door and didn't go inside. My friend had to get something for me in [City] and we both sat in the car. By the time I came back I didn't feel right, like a flu coming. I didn't work on Friday because of this.

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

My wife also had flu symptoms, but we didn't think it was COVID as majority of people get the flu every year. Some might get it for a couple of days, some get it seriously like pneumonia. My wife got symptoms the very first day of the lockdown after last minute shopping. She had a body ache, temperature, headache, couldn't eat, but after a week she got better. I asked if I should sleep in a separate room, but she thought it was only a bit of flu.

When I got it, I went in a separate bedroom. I had a fever and symptoms for 12 days before Isha called NHS 111. We thought it would go down today or tomorrow, but my temperature wouldn't go down. We didn't bother ringing our GP. My nephew is a doctor, so we used to ring him every day. We have a GP in the family as well, she used to ring and say 'how's uncle doing?'

My wife kept giving me paracetamols, but I couldn't sleep or eat. We thought that was normal until my son said otherwise - he works for NHS 111 at the call center at night, so he knows what he's doing. He came home and checked my temperature and oxygen levels. A family doctor said to call the ambulance and it came within ten minutes, all in PPE. They took me into hospital, as I had breathing problems. The whole street was watching - that's when you know you've got good neighbours though.

The doctors and nurses were very good. They took me in a separate room and checked my oxygen, temperature and everything. I took a paracetamol before the ambulance arrived, so I felt a bit better. I was moved to an assessment ward for another day. They took me for a blood test and moved me to another ward. At 12 o'clock at night, the nurse came in saying they were moving me to a COVID ward. I was the youngest person on the ward. There were four people in the ward, I think all over 70.

They gave me antibiotics and after two days I felt better. I couldn't eat, but body wise I was feeling a bit better. I could go to the toilet myself and walk around the ward. They kept me three more days in the COVID ward, but then I wanted to go home. The Asian doctor kept me in another day, so I was in hospital for five days and it took more than two weeks to get better.

My wife had it first and then me and my friends, so I don't know who was the carrier. One of my friends called the ambulance as well and they took him to A&E, but sent him back home. After two weeks you can tell his breathing is still not right. Another friend did not have breathing difficulty, but he's very weak.

Our life after COVID

When I came back from the hospital I stayed in another room. My son would not let us see his kids for over a month. They used to get our shopping and put it outside because we both were not fit enough to cook. They were quite helpful. People go away from me now, they don't want to shake hands or anything. If I'm in their position I might think the same thing.

I've recovered fully now. During Eid² we all stayed home. But other places like restaurants look back to normal now. In the community, mosques¹ are back to normal with regulations. My wife is saving up for a holiday, but I would say no because when you go on holiday you need an atmosphere, you don't need to be putting on a

² 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).

mask and keeping your distance. I'd like to go back to Turkey, but if there's not many people visiting there I would feel bored.

My friends have recovered too. I only know two people who died and they're a young age, but they had an illness before like diabetes, asthma, kidney problem, so they might get more infected. So, in my opinion, it's not that serious. One is a Bengali lad who had a heart attack. Another guy in [city] got COVID and was kept in intensive care for two months on a ventilator and then he passed away.

Why our COVID experience matters

There's a lot of things we didn't know that we were supposed to do. The information about lockdown was not available in the way that it needed to be. Some people follow it very strictly, but some people are not putting the masks on. In our community, the people don't take it seriously. I think that's why Asians got more infected than other English people - in our culture the people get together. Many of the taxi drivers who worked during this lockdown are still nice and fit. Some people get it, some people don't. If you get together in big groups people will still catch that flu.

The only person who can tell whether the government regulations worked or not is the people working in the NHS. I think when the Government enforced lockdown, they didn't have to lockdown all the country. It's good if they lockdown the areas where many people have the virus. They say Leicester is in lockdown, but people are going to Leicester and coming from Leicester. If they locked down Bolton, they won't let anyone out and go to other places like Blackburn or Manchester until it's all clear. You can't force people to stop going to places, but you give them advice. Then if people have to go, they should test their temperature, like they're doing in the mosque¹ at the moment. and it only takes a couple of seconds. They're strict in the mosque¹, if you don't listen they don't let you in.