Sikh Patient Healthcare Provider Guidelines

The attached guidelines are for medical providers (Doctors, Nurses, etc.). This resource should be provided to your primary healthcare provider upon arrival for medical treatment.

1. **Explain your articles of faith** (see the figure on page 2) and what removal aspects you are or are not comfortable with. For example (please edit as you see fit for yourself or a family member):
   a. I cannot cut any hair on my body. If hair removal is a medical necessity and I have agreed to it after your explanation as to why it’s necessary, remove only what is required for the procedure. Any hair removed from the head or face should be returned to me for disposal.
   b. I wear a kara (bracelet) and/or kirpan for religious purposes. [If asked to remove: reiterate that these articles of faith do not pose a security risk].
   c. If removal of my articles of faith is medically necessary for my procedure, please seek permission first. Any removed article of faith should be respectfully placed in a clean, safe place with my personal belongings.

2. **Explain all dietary requirements and restrictions on medications.** In addition to allergies, please share if you are a vegetarian, if you are willing to take any medications or food with animal byproducts, or if you have any requirements around medication and opioids.

3. **As a general rule when obtaining any serious medical care, make sure you have shared your desires for goals of care and complete documentation**—such as Physicians Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST)—with your family (health care proxy) and your healthcare providers so that your wishes for while you are being cared for in the hospital can be followed. This may include your preference/wishes for IV, medications, artificial tube feeding, intubation (breathing with the help of a machine), organ donation, and resuscitation/do-not-resuscitate orders, as well as end of life care including visitations, hospice, and funeral preparation.

The Sikh Coalition encourages you to share this guide with friends and family so that they know where to find it in the event of a COVID-19 medical emergency.
**SIKH ARTICLES OF FAITH**

- **KANGA**
  - small comb

- **KIRPAN**
  - religious article resembling a knife

- **KACHERA**
  - slightly longer type of underpants

- **KARA**
  - steel or iron bracelet

- **KESH**
  - unshorn hair

**KESH**

- men must and women may wear turbans, the traditional head covering for Sikhs’ uncut hair
We know medical providers are dealing with emergency situations related to the recent COVID-19 outbreak, and healthcare professionals (“HP”) will come into contact with patients of all backgrounds as a result. This guide was created to give HPs across the country information about how to provide culturally sensitive care for Sikh patients, including an overview of issues that Sikh patients may face and best practices in responding to those concerns. **This guide is intended for informational purposes only and should not be considered legal advice. The patient or their family should always be consulted first. If you require additional information or assistance, please email community@sikhcoalition.org.**

1. **What are articles of faith and/or clothing that a Sikh may carry?** Sikhism is a monotheistic religion originally founded in South Asia. Members of the Sikh faith also maintain articles of faith (“5Ks”) which are central to the religion. It is important to note that not all Sikhs maintain all of the 5Ks, as it varies based on an individual’s level of observance and whether they have been initiated into the faith through the amrit sanchar ceremony. Most Sikhs who maintain their articles of faith do so on their person at all times, in compliance with their faith practice, so it is extremely important that none of the 5Ks are removed from a Sikh patient without consent. If removal is necessary, care providers should reassure the patient that the items will be handled in a respectful manner (i.e. will not be placed on the floor, near anyone’s feet, or tossed in a bag with the patient’s dirty laundry). Additionally, some of the 5Ks may require greater communication when providing patient care, addressed below. The 5Ks include:

   a. **Kesh:** Uncut hair on any part of the body, which is mandatory for both men and women. Men and some women will wear a turban (Dastaar) to cover their uncut hair, while some women use a scarf (chunni). The Dastaar or other head-coverings are also articles of faith.
      
      i. **Providers Should Know:** Sikhs cannot cut their Kesh, and their heads should remain covered at all times. Removing a Sikh’s turban or scarf in public is akin to a strip search.
      
      ii. **Patient Care Notes:** Consider alternative procedures where hair removal would not be necessary. For example, If an endotracheal tube (breathing tube) needs to be secured, recommend one that does not disturb facial hair (e.g. Dale Stabilock ETT Tube holder or Anchorfast OETT holder from Hollister). If alternatives are not available, advise patients or their health care proxy as far in advance as possible of procedures requiring hair removal from any part of their body, so they may make an informed decision as to their medical care, consistent with their individual religious practice. If hair removal is a medical necessity and the patient agrees, remove only what is necessary for the procedure after securing permission. Any hair removed from the head or face should be returned to the patient for disposal.

   b. **Kirpan:** An object resembling a sword that obligates a Sikh to seek justice and fight oppression. There is no prescribed length, shape, or sharpness for a kirpan in Sikhism;
they are determined by the individual religious convictions of the wearer. Kirpans are typically sheathed and worn with a gatra (a strap), sometimes underneath clothing.

i. **Providers Should Know:** The Kirpan is worn with a benign intent. It has consistently been viewed as a religious article of faith and not a weapon by courts across the country, and thus poses no security risk (see Kirpan factsheet). Family members may also wear a kirpan while visiting the facility. Please see this case example for more information and context.

ii. **Patient Care Notes:** Advise the patient or their health care proxy as far in advance as possible of procedures requiring Kirpan removal so they may make an informed decision as to their medical care that is consistent with their individual religious practice. If removal is medically necessary for a procedure, it should be respectfully placed in a clean, safe place with the patient’s personal belongings.

c. **Kangha:** A small wooden comb for the maintenance of the uncut hair.
   i. **Patient Care Notes:** If removal is medically necessary for a procedure, it should be respectfully placed in a clean, safe place with the patient’s personal belongings.

d. **Kara:** A steel bracelet that reminds Sikhs to engage in ethical conduct.
   i. **Patient Care Notes:** If Kara removal is medically necessary for a procedure, it should be respectfully placed in a clean, safe place with the patient’s personal belongings. For some, the kara may be difficult to remove if it fits tightly on their wrist. In an emergency situation, and with permission if possible, it may be cut to remove it.

e. **Kachera:** Cotton underwear (resembling knee-length shorts) which reflect the dignity, modesty, and high moral character of the wearer.

2. **Are there any medications, treatments/procedures, or dietary practices pertinent to Sikhs?** Generally, there are no religious prohibitions on any medications in Sikhism; many Sikhs will accept medication that contains alcohol or narcotics as long as the intention is to heal and not to become intoxicated. However, some Sikhs also practice vegetarianism (including eggs) and will not want to accept medication that contains animal byproducts (such as gelcaps). All options should be shared with the patient or a health care proxy before administering the drug, and if possible, alternatives should be shared as well. If there are no treatment options that meet Sikh medical or dietary requirements, this should be clearly explained and discussed with the patient, so they may make an informed decision on their medical care. Additionally, some Sikhs may also choose to combine South Asian alternative medicine practices, including homeopathy, naturopathy, and herbal medications, with Western healthcare.

3. **What languages do Sikhs speak?** While many Sikhs do speak English, some may be more comfortable speaking in Punjabi--especially while in duress. If that is the patient’s
Can Sikhs donate organs or accept organ/blood/marrow donations? Organ and marrow donation or blood transfusions are generally acceptable to Sikhs, either to accept or donate. This should be discussed with the patient, as an individual may have personal preferences consistent with their individual religious practice.

Are there important end-of-life care beliefs? It is customary for relatives and religious community members to visit patients when death is imminent. Though the patient retains the final say, relatives will expect close involvement in end-of-life treatment and decisions. If that is not possible, relatives may also be asked to limit the number visiting and then rotate and take turns. Severely ill Sikhs may be visited by a granthi (a person who has studied the Sikh scripture extensively). The granthi or family members will read hymns from the scripture and pray with the patient to spiritually prepare him or her for death. Visitors may wish to place written hymns or prayers beside the patient or have digital devices play prayers. After a Sikh has passed away, loved ones may recite sacred hymns together. Due to COVID-19 limitations, a virtual compromise may be acceptable. If you need assistance in locating a community member or granthi who can provide this type of support (similar to the way a chaplain might do so), please email community@sikhcoalition.org.

What should be done with the body after death? Upon a Sikh patient’s death, the body should be dressed and wrapped in a clean, white cloth. Articles of faith should not be removed, including any hair from the patient or head coverings. If articles of faith were removed for medical procedures, they should be returned and placed with/on the body. The family may not be comfortable with hospital staff washing the body, as the body cleansing is a religious practice for Sikhs and may be done in a manner that reduces exposure to contagious illnesses. Most Sikhs will not object to a postmortem when necessary. Sikhs normally cremate the body within ten days once it is deceased. Given CDC guidance on COVID-19 patients to funeral homes, families may be present for funeral services in compliance with social distancing guidelines. Sikhs may ask to wait to cremate until all family members have completed their self-isolation period.

For more information, please visit www.sikhcoalition.org or email community@sikhcoalition.org. This document is adapted from the Sikh Coalition’s Guide for Healthcare Professionals, to be released in 2020. This adaptation was created along with a host of other materials in rapid response for COVID-19.
मिन्ह आन्दोलन के लिए रेखांकन नहीं जारी है।

प्रायोजनों के लिए इन नीतियों का प्रस्तावनाम समय के संबंध में करें।

१. अपने आत्मवांत आदेश देने से इस्तेमाल नहीं करें। इसके लिए अपना आत्मवांत आदेश देने से इस्तेमाल नहीं करें। इसके लिए अपना आत्मवांत आदेश देने से इस्तेमाल नहीं करें।

२. अपनी मुख्य दीर्घशिर्कत लेने से इस्तेमाल नहीं करें। इसके लिए अपनी मुख्य दीर्घशिर्कत लेने से इस्तेमाल नहीं करें।

३. इन्हें लें और इन्हें पता चलाए। इनके साथ इन्हें लें। इन्हें पता चलाए। इन्हें पता चलाए।