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Updated March 2022

At a glance - Ramadan

Fasting plays an important role in many major religions and is a central feature in all the Abrahamic faiths. In Islam, adult Muslims, who are able to, are required to fast during the month of Ramadan. Fasting has been ordained to improve mindfulness of Allah (God) in Muslims' day-to-day lives. For this reason, Ramadan is a time of prayer and self-reflection, where Muslims are encouraged to read the Qur'an, increase in their charitable giving and in worship. These acts engender a sense of gratitude, self-discipline and restraint, which should continue throughout the year.

This guidance includes specific advice around COVID-19 and implications for fasting in Ramadan for staff, and how line managers can support colleagues who are fasting.



When is Ramadan?

The Islamic calendar is calculated according to the lunar cycles, so the month of Ramadan begins when the new moon is sighted. As a result, the start and finish times change from year to year, usually advancing 10 days earlier every year. Ramadan lasts for 29-30 days and ends with the celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr.

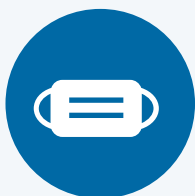
This year Ramadan is due to start on 2 or 3 April 2022, depending on the sighting of the new moon; Eid-ul-Fitr is likely to be on 2 or 3 May 2022.

What do Muslims do during Ramadan?

All Muslims (who are not exempt) are instructed to fast from dawn to sunset daily. Fasting, in Islam, is the act of complete abstinence from food, drink, smoking and intimate sexual relations during this part of the day. Bad behaviour such as lying, deceiving, swearing or insulting others also detracts from the reward of the one who is fasting.

The fast is broken at sunset with a meal called iftar. Following the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), most Muslims will first drink water or eat dates and then have their meal.

In addition to fasting, Muslims will also spend most of their evenings in a special supererogatory prayer called Taraweeh, which is usually performed in congregation at a mosque. Alternatively, Taraweeh prayers may be performed individually at home or in the workplace. The prayer can take anywhere between one to three hours. Currently all remaining legal restrictions in England have been lifted as part of the Government's 'Living with Covid' plan.



This includes face coverings being no longer legally required in most public spaces (excluding healthcare settings) and people with COVID-19 no longer legally needing to self-isolate. Nevertheless, the Muslim Network Health Collaboration strongly encourages



Muslim staff to take the relevant precautions in order to keep themselves and communities safe. Mosques and community venues where congregational prayers take place should ensure adequate ventilation and encourage mask use.



This will help protect prayer attendees that are most vulnerable and minimise COVID-19 transmission.

Who is exempt from fasting?



Some staff may not be fasting for some part or the entire month of Ramadan. Muslims can be exempt from fasting for the following reasons:

- 1** Having an illness (physical or mental), taking medication or being very frail
- 2** Menstruating or experiencing lochia discharge as a woman
- 3** Being a pregnant or lactating woman who has credible health concerns for oneself or child
- 4** Travelling
- 5** Being a frontline healthcare staff (required to provide care to COVID-19 patients) at real risk of dehydration due to wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) and long shifts

Depending on one's situation, some staff who fall under the above categories may choose to continue fasting. Additionally, it is important to be sensitive to those who may not be fasting, especially those who may feel a sense of disappointment for not being able to fast. Nevertheless, those exempted from fasting are still able to observe Ramadan and reap the special blessings and spiritual benefits during this time in other ways.

Key workplace considerations during Ramadan

The NHS has a diverse workforce. Line managers, supervisors and colleagues should be aware of key advice relating to Muslim staff who may be observing/fasting during the month of Ramadan. We recommend the following tips for supporting NHS Muslim staff and colleagues throughout the month of Ramadan:

- 1** Do not make assumptions about who may or may not be observing Ramadan – Islam is a faith that welcomes people of all races and backgrounds. Therefore, please create the space and opportunity for colleagues to discuss whether they are observing Ramadan.
- 2** Remember that some Muslim staff may be exempt from fasting (e.g. due to a medical condition, women on their menses etc.) so managers and colleagues are asked to be mindful and sensitive and advised not to ask why a Muslim colleague is eating and/or drinking.
- 3** Observing Ramadan may not be noticeable so make it easy for your team members to let you know if they are fasting. For example, by increasing awareness around fasting and Ramadan through prompting the discussions within team meetings and communications such as newsletters.
- 4** If you manage a member of staff who will be observing Ramadan, ensure that you have some one-to-one time to discuss any workplace adjustments that can be considered. For example, staff may prefer to take their breaks at irregular times or split them throughout the day.
- 5** If members of the team observing Ramadan feel comfortable doing so, encourage them to give short presentations and have discussions about Ramadan and how the team can best support them.
- 6** Fasting can affect people in different ways (for example, some people may understandably become a little quieter or slightly tired at times, even though most staff have fed back that their productivity increases after the first few days of fasting).
- 7** Dignity and respect from managers and colleagues are helpful and expected behaviours. Since colleagues that are fasting will not be drinking any fluid (including water) throughout the day, they may feel less energetic and prefer more non-verbal means of communication on occasions – this should not be taken personally and instead a variety of communication methods should be made possible e.g. chatbox function rather than talking in meetings.
- 8** Colleagues who are fasting will not expect others, who are not observing Ramadan to do the same, so please do not feel anxious about making a cup of tea or eating your lunch. However, please be sensitive by not continually offering them a piece of cake!

- 9** Workplace adjustments should not impact negatively on delivery outcomes (including direct patient care). Managers and their staff can discuss and consider options such as occasional working from home (where appropriate to the role and individual circumstances), core hour working (where time can be made up in lieu), and provision for paid and unpaid leave (where viable). When Ramadan falls in the summer months it can be particularly challenging, as the days are longer.
- 10** You may find that some staff request up to two weeks annual leave towards the end of Ramadan to help them focus on and increase their acts of worship. This should be treated as any other annual leave request; therefore, managers should use their judgment to ensure that any negative impact on the team and delivery outcomes (including direct patient care) is mitigated against whilst also trying to accommodate as fully as possible.
- 11** There is uncertainty around what day Eid will fall on (2 or 3 May 2022) as it depends on the sighting of the moon which is only known in the last few days of Ramadan. Staff may ask to take annual leave on either day, managers should therefore try and be flexible to accommodate for this.
- 12** Please ensure staff have reasonable time during the day to complete prayers and an appropriate space within the working environment is allocated for this purpose. We have developed a [prayer guidance for NHS staff and managers](#) to increase awareness around Islamic prayers and flexibility during working hours. With the additional pressure on staff due to COVID-19, staff may have to vary their times for daily prayers and, hence it is important that staff are provided with a permanent place for prayer.



Advice for employers

- 1** Where possible, communications around Ramadan and Eid should be developed to raise awareness across the organisation. This includes information to colleagues about Ramadan and how they can support those observing the month in the form of webinars, staff blogs and pieces featured in internal newsletters and on intranets.
- Relevant colleagues (such as Chaplains, HR and Estate leads) should work together to ensure that provision of prayer spaces within organisations (e.g. hospitals and office buildings) remain safe and COVID secure. For example, within prayer spaces, staff should be able to socially distance and follow infection control guidelines.
- 2** A local review of prayer space provision may be required where ventilation is poor, spaces are too small or in the case of hospitals, are not staff-specific and include mixing with patients. In hospitals, local Infection Protection and Control (IPC) teams would be best placed to work with Chaplains and Estates to ensure the safe operating of prayer spaces. In office buildings, HR and Estates would be the best people to contact regarding this. In the event of the closure of prayer rooms (for example due to cleaning), please ensure that staff are given enough notice, and reasonable alternative arrangements are made so that they have a safe place to pray.
- 3** Frontline employers should refer to the [published fit-testing guidance](#) on adjustments that can be made to allow for continued safe working during the pandemic for staff observing Ramadan and needing to use PPE.

Advice for colleagues who are fasting

- 1** Prior to the month of Ramadan, do let your manager know you will be fasting and discuss the impact it may have on your routine or habits. They can then support you by considering reasonable workplace adjustments. They will also be able to seek your guidance on and alert you to events where iftar meals may be served.
- 2** Where you can, balance your workday. Try to organise your day so that rotas, meetings and conference calls happen, where possible, when you are at your most alert, ensuring that factors such as your colleagues' own requirements and patient care (if applicable) are also considered.
- 3** Any annual leave requests should be discussed with your line manager well in advance and while booking, discuss how you can maintain minimal impact on delivery outcomes (such as patient care or team working).
- 4** As usual, try to ensure that you take regular breaks throughout the day, and where possible, get some fresh air at these times.
- 5** Discuss with your manager how you can make provisions for prayer times during the working day. With current work pressures due to the COVID-19 and addressing activity backlog, please be considerate in terms of how much time you request to ensure core work priorities (including patient care) are not adversely affected.
- 6** Eat healthy nutritious meals and drink lots of water throughout the period when you are not fasting to keep hydrated and avoid headaches and tiredness.
- 7** If you are not well (COVID-19 related or generally) or pregnant, please consider the concession provided by the religion whereby certain groups are excused from fasting. Seek medical advice if you are unsure. It may be possible to make up the missed fasts at a later date in the year if and once you feel capable.
- 8** Connect with other Muslims and allies by tuning into the NHS Muslim Network's virtual webinars during the blessed month of Ramadan. We will be hosting our yearly event of welcoming Ramadan, which will cover topics such as its purpose, the benefits of fasting, sharing tips on how to make the most of this month and how staff can support those who are fasting while working.

There will also be a session on Zakat and Eid-ul-Fitr and social media engagement
For more information, please contact England.muslim1@nhs.net or follow us.

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COVID-19 Vaccine, Testing and Fasting

One of the best ways to protect yourself and the community is through getting vaccinated. Vaccination has been and continues to be essential for helping to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. Government guidance is that everyone over the age of 16 and over should now have had at least three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. If you have not, the Muslim Network Health Collaboration strongly recommends you do so. Islamic scholars have suggested that receiving vaccines does not invalidate the fast. Hence, there is no need to worry about your fast being broken if you arrange to have your vaccine during Ramadan. Other concerns raised regarding the vaccine include experiencing side effects while fasting. Most side effects are mild, lasting a few hours and are self-limiting. However, should a person become more unwell after receiving the vaccine then the general principle pertaining to illness and fasting apply. None of the available vaccines contain any material of foetal or animal origin and they are considered to be Halal by scholars. More information on fasting and vaccines can be found on the [British Islamic Medical Association](#) website and colleagues are encouraged to, where possible, to provide advocacy to their wider communities in taking the COVID-19 vaccine.

Additionally, despite no longer needing to self-isolate if you are tested positive for COVID-19, the Muslim Network Health Collaborative recommends you to minimise contact in order to protect those around you. Please be reassured that scholars are of the opinion that having a COVID-19 swabbing test or lateral flow test does not invalidate the fast

Eid ul-Fitr

The end of Ramadan is celebrated with Eid-ul-Fitr – the festival of “fast-breaking”. On the morning of Eid, Muslims go to the mosque for a special prayer. This is usually followed by visits to families and friends, exchanging gifts and socialising.

Muslims extend celebration greetings with each other using phrases such as “Eid Mubarak”. You may want to share Eid Mubarak wishes with your Muslim colleagues to mark the occasion.

Thank you

We would like to commend all NHS staff who have supported the pandemic response, whether that has been attending to patients affected by coronavirus or working to ensure efficient and effective service delivery. This is a great act of giving and sacrifice and the rewards in Ramadan will be multiplied manifold.

