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Ramadan 2020

Guidance for Colleagues and Line Managers

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Guidance

This Ramadan guidance is prepared for employees, line managers and senior leadership across the Civil Service and associated agencies. There are two aims:

- that we all recognise and respect the importance of Ramadan for Muslims and how best to support our colleagues during this period: and
- in addition to your departmental or agency Muslim Networks to act as a focal point and convener and provide support and guidance to achieving collaborative pragmatic and forward-looking solutions.

We encourage you to discuss and implement this guidance through on-going local line management and team discussions, and to share widely to benefit others. We have included both hyperlinks and footnotes to enable access to additional links.

COVID-19 and Ramadan

This year, Ramadan comes at a time when solidarity, compassion and respect alongside faith, God consciousness and prayer are especially needed. Measures to combat the Covid-19 pandemic will continue throughout April and May 2020, this will impact how Muslims are able to observe Ramadan and fulfil their faith needs.

In line with Government instructions most colleagues will be working from home. The continuation of current lockdown measures would mean places of worship remain closed, and that congregational prayer, iftar (opening of the fast) and other communal activities will not take place in Mosques or Islamic Centres. Many Muslim colleagues will therefore pursue and enhance their God consciousness and spiritual connection in their homes.

Please regularly check and follow [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) for updates on Covid-19.



What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar and is one of the holiest months of the year for Muslims. The primary purpose of this month is to improve God consciousness, transliterated from Arabic as taqwa. Fasting is a core act of worship in this month.

It is a time of spiritual reflection, self-improvement and worship when Muslims draw closer to God, known as Allah in Arabic. Taqwa is achieved through an increase in prayers, reading the Quran and giving charity, amongst other actions. Muslims aim to continue positive values such as generosity, patience and forgiveness, with the intention that they strive to maintain these model values throughout the year.

When is it?

The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar cycle, which is around 11 days shorter than the solar Gregorian calendar and therefore starts earlier each successive year. The month starts on the night the new moon is sighted. Each month is 29 or 30 days. This year Ramadan is expected to start on the evening of Thursday 23rd April. As the commencement of Ramadan is confirmed by moon sighting, this date may vary by a day.

Why is it important and significant to Muslims?

There are several significant reasons Muslims change their day to day practice in the run up to, during and after Ramadan. This includes:

1. Muslims are commanded to adhere to [five Pillars in Islam](#)¹: declaration of faith, five daily prayers, giving charity, fasting, pilgrimage of hajj (if able to do so). Ramadan is the month to fulfil the fourth pillar of fasting. As [fasting has no equivalent in reward](#)², Muslims prepare for Ramadan in the preceding months and often continue to fast in the month of Shawwal proceeding Ramadan.
2. As Ramadan is a time of increased blessing, Muslims seek to increase their good deeds. The majority of Muslims choose to fulfil their third pillar of Islam obligation by giving 2.5% of their net wealth in charity, transliterated from Arabic as [zakat](#)³ to gain even greater reward.
3. Ramadan is the month in which the Muslim holy book, the [Quran](#)⁴, was revealed to Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him). Muslims increase recitation and reflection on the Quran in this month.
4. It is the month in which there is the Night of Power, transliterated from Arabic as [Laylat-ul Qadr](#).⁵ Its signs and virtues are specified in a dedicated chapter in the Quran. This night is one of the odd nights in the last 10 nights of Ramadan i.e. 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th of Ramadan. The last 10 nights of Ramadan are the holiest, and Muslims believe that if one stands in prayer or performs an act of worship in faith and sincerity, the reward is the equivalent of 1000 months of worship. It is why so many Muslim colleagues either take some form of leave or seek to alter working patterns to benefit from this night⁶.
5. Ramadan is a time of additional kindness, compassion and generosity. It is the month to renew ties, implement the words of the Quran and Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) who said he was not sent to mankind except to perfect good character; and build community relations.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/fivepillars.shtml>

² <https://www.islam21c.com/latest-islamic/229-fasting-has-no-equivalent/>

³ <https://www.nzf.org.uk/About>

⁴ <https://quran.com/>

⁵ <https://quran.com/97>

⁶ <https://productivemuslim.com/laylatul-qadr-worship-plan-to-maximise-the-last-10-nights-of-ramadan/>

What does fasting involve

There are [three levels of fasting](#):⁷ The general fast, the specific fast, and the further specific fast.

- The general fast is the refraining from eating and drinking and sexual acts.
- The specific fast is the refraining of one's gaze, tongue, hands, feet, hearing and eyes, as well as the rest of his body parts from committing sinful acts.
- The more specific fast, is striving to condition the heart to draw closer to Allah and abstain from things that either distract from this.

The general fast fulfils the Islamic requirement of fasting. However, a person can strive to achieve the status of the further specific fast as it has a greater benefit and reward.

What happens during Ramadan

This year, fasts will last for 17 hours on average, with varying start and end times throughout the month. Fasting periods are framed around the five daily prayers, which are referred to as Fajr (morning prayer), Zuhr (midday prayer), Asr (mid-afternoon prayer), Maghrib (dusk prayer) and Isha (evening prayer). This [timetable](#)⁸ shows prayer start times, and congregational (jamaat) prayer times in Birmingham.

The actual start time for fasting is the start of the pre-dawn Fajr prayer which on Thursday 23 April is 4.13am and the fast end time that day is the start of the sunset Maghrib prayer at 8.21pm. These timings should be adjusted for each city. For example, on the same day Fajr and Maghrib are at 4.10am and 8.14pm in London and 3.11am and 8.46pm in Glasgow. Shorter days for those closest to the equator.

In a typical day every Muslim will do two things the world over. That is:

- they wake up to have the highly recommended pre-dawn breakfast, known as suhur in Arabic, and either pray or engage in some form of worship before and or after the time for the Fajr prayer; and
- to have a sunset meal, known as iftar in Arabic, to open the fast. This is also done either immediately before or after the Maghrib prayer.

Everything else is individual specific. Some use [Ramadan diaries](#)⁹ or [Ramadan boosters](#)¹⁰ to help maximise their day to meet both work commitments and personal spiritual goals.

⁷ <https://www.islam21c.com/latest-islamic/3227-the-inner-secrets-of-fasting/>

⁸ <https://www.greenlanemasjid.org/prayer-timetable/>

Exemptions

Fasting is only prescribed for those able to do so. Those listed below, amongst others, are exempt from fasting. Many Muslims who are unable to fast will engage in the other forms of worship described in this guidance.

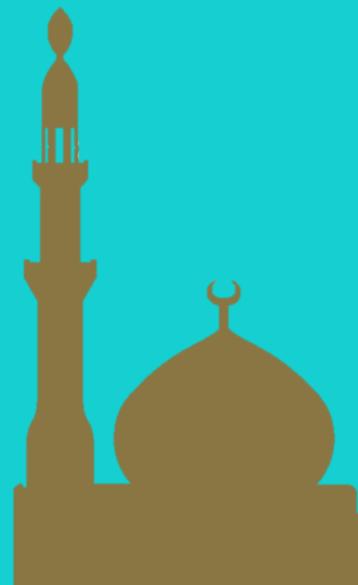


Those who are able to fast, but have to break their fast due to ill health, and those who are exempt from fasting are required to offer a specific type of charity, known as [fidya](#)¹¹ in Arabic, in lieu of their fast. This charity is specifically used to feed the hungry.

Increase in worship

In addition to regular, obligatory prayers Ramadan brings additional voluntary acts of worship:

- **Tarawih prayers:** These are congregational prayers performed in Mosques each night during Ramadan in addition to the five daily prayers. The Imam will recite the entire Quran over the month, and prayers can last between one to two hours each night in cycles of 2 units of prayer.
- **Itikhaf:** The last ten days of Ramadan are the holiest, so some Muslims spend them in seclusion, known as transliterated from Arabic as itikhaf, where they dedicate the entire period to worshipping Allah, devoid of any distraction.
- **Laylat-ul-Qadr:** Please see information above.
- **Quran:** Muslims are encouraged to read and reflect upon the Quran throughout Ramadan.



Tarawih and itikhaf are subject to COVID-19 instructions and guidance.

Increased charity and compassion

In addition to paying zakat, Muslims increase charitable activities during Ramadan. According to the Charity Commission, British Muslim charities raised £130 million during the month of Ramadan alone in 2018. That's equivalent of £38 per second during Ramadan, or £371 per individual over the year.

¹¹ <https://www.islam21c.com/islamic-law/qada-fidya-kafara/>



Eid ul Fitr

Eid is a day of celebration. It is the first day of the 10th Islamic month called Shawaal and marks the end of Ramadan.

This year, Eid will either take place on Saturday 23rd May or Sunday 24th May depending on the sighting of the moon. The day begins with a congregational Eid prayer ideally in an open space prayer. A special Eid zakat payment is made prior to offering the Eid prayer. This money is distributed to the poor to ensure they are able to celebrate Eid and is generally spent on food and gifts for children. The Eid prayer is typically followed by celebratory meals and gift exchanges with family and friends. Most Muslims will follow eight highly recommended [steps](#)¹².

Guidance for Muslim colleagues and Line Managers

The Civil Service is one of the most inclusive UK employers. We however actively promote and support the Civil Service to be the most inclusive employer in the UK. Here are some steps you can take to help achieve that ambition.

Muslim colleagues

You should **plan ahead**. Speak to your line manager about special arrangements or requests for leave in advance of Ramadan, as early as possible. Take personal responsibility for ensuring that neither business needs, nor your own needs, are unnecessarily impacted. In addition:

- **Take precaution:** If you are required to attend the workplace during COVID-19 measures, please ensure you follow safety instructions and guidance when using ablution and prayer facilities. We also advise using only personal items e.g. prayer mats, and that these are not stored in the room.
- **Share:** If you are participating in meetings, let others know of your needs. Also, share your experience with colleagues, not forgetting Eid festivities!
- **Productivity Tip:** Balance your workday. Organise your day so that rotas, meetings and conference calls happen, where possible, when you are at your most alert, ensuring that your colleague's own requirements are also considered.
- **Remain positive:** Remember the benefits and blessings that Ramadan brings at a time when your blood sugar levels are low for example and think positively. Use the examples listed in this guide or look online for tips and information on how you can make the most of your Ramadan.

¹² <https://charityright.org.uk/post/here-are-8-easy-sunnah-acts-you-should-know-about-for-eid-al-fitr/>

Guidance for Managers

Ramadan is special time of the year for Muslims. As well as increasing worship during this month, most Muslims also continue with their normal duties. Fasting may affect people in different ways, for example fatigue from adapting to fasting and a change of routine. Engaging colleagues and employees and showing understanding can be helpful to ensuring a productive working environment for all.

Some useful tips:

1. Do not make **assumptions** about who in your team may be observing Ramadan – Islam is a faith practised by all races and backgrounds.
2. If you manage an employee who will be observing Ramadan, ensure that you have some **1-1 time** to discuss any workplace adjustments that can be considered. Fasting can **affect people in different ways**. For example, some may understandably become a little quieter or slightly tired at times, even though most staff have fed back that their productivity increased after the first few days.
3. **Dignity and respect** from managers and colleagues is helpful and expected. Be aware that fasting colleagues will not even be drinking any fluid (including water) and they may therefore feel less energetic and less inclined to join in office conversations on occasions – don't take it personally and consider communication in other ways where possible.
4. Please ensure employees have **reasonable time during the day to complete prayers and an appropriate space is allocated** for this purpose. 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.
5. Colleagues who are fasting will not expect others those who are not observing Ramadan to do the same, so please **don't feel anxious about making a cup of tea for the team or eating your lunch**. However, please be sensitive by not continually offering them a piece of cake!
6. If members of the team observing Ramadan feel comfortable doing so, encourage them to give **short presentations** and encourage normal discussions about Ramadan and how the team can best support them.



Typical requests are likely to be for flexible working, time to be able to complete prayers which should be accommodated in the same way as colleagues going to the gym, or a cigarette break, and requests for annual leave during Ramadan, in particular during the last 10 nights, and/or to celebrate Eid.

CSMN guidance, support and collaborative solutions

We are here to help. We know this guidance doesn't cover everything - it can't. So please get in touch with your local Muslim Network or contact us directly. **There is no such thing as a silly question. We work to achieve collaborative pragmatic and forward-looking solutions.**

Please feel free to get in touch at csmn@hmrc.gov.uk in the first Instance. You can also contact the CSMN directly.

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Ramadan Kareem (happy Ramadan) and hope you have a fantastic Eid.

CSMN Executive Team