

Ramadan Guidance 2021

This document provides an overview, context and awareness raising for Inclusive Employers who want to ensure inclusion of their Muslim colleagues during this important holy month.

As with many aspects of normal life, the covid 19 virus will continue to have an impact on how people can practice their faith and this includes how people can observe Ramadan this year.

When is Ramadan 2021?

Ramadan will begin this year on the evening of Monday 12 April and ends in the evening of Wednesday 12 May. Muslims follow the lunar calendar, so the exact start and end dates depend on the sighting of the moon so these dates can vary slightly.

Ramadan is followed by the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr, a celebration to mark the end of Ramadan, which will take start on the evening of Wednesday 12 May and the evening of Thursday 13 May 2021.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the name of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar.

Muslims believe it is the month during which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) over 1400

years ago. Ramadan is the holiest month of the year for Muslims and it is considered that the reward of good deeds during this month are multiplied several fold.

During Ramadan, from dawn until sunset, Muslims are obliged to abstain from all forms of food, drink (including water), smoking and sexual intercourse. Most Muslims will wake before dawn for a meal before the start of their fast (also known as Suhoor), and break their fast (also known as Iftar) with dates and water at sunset, and then a meal.

This year, fasts in the UK will last around 15-16 hours. The start and end times vary as the month progresses. Those exempt from fasting are children, the elderly, the sick or people with long term health problems (e.g. diabetes), those travelling long distances, women during their monthly cycle, pregnant women and breastfeeding women.

Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. The overall purpose of the fast is to gain Taqwa (which means to gain piety or God consciousness). This is achieved through an increase in prayers, reading the Qur'an, self-reflection and self-discipline.

Muslims are encouraged to increase their good deeds in Ramadan, from giving to charity to increasing good values such as generosity, patience and forgiveness, with the intention that they strive to maintain these model values throughout the year.

In addition to offering the five daily prayers during Ramadan, many Muslims usually spend extra time in worship in one or more of the following:

- Taraweeh prayers – These are extra congregational prayers performed in mosques each night during Ramadan. The person leading the prayer (imam) will recite the entire Qur'an from memory over the month. While the duration of the prayers is dependent on a number of factors, they last between one and two hours each night and start about half an hour after the last prayers (Isha).
- Itikhaf – When someone decides to enter Itikhaf, which is a significant act of worship, they live in the mosque for the last 10 nights of Ramadan with the aim of increasing their worship to God in a focused way devoid of any distraction.

- Laylat-ul-Qadr – This is the most holy night for Muslims and is translated as the 'Night of Power', when Muslims are encouraged to increase their worship and some may do so throughout the night. Islamic traditions state that if this night is spent in devotion, it is equivalent to a thousand months in prayer. Laylat-ul-Qadr occurs on one of the last 10 odd-numbered nights of Ramadan, although the exact date is not known. Therefore, many Muslims significantly increase their prayer and worship on the odd numbered nights of the last third of Ramadan. End of Ramadan celebrations
- Eid-ul-Fitr is the festival which marks the end of Ramadan, and this year will take place between the evening of Wednesday 12 May and the evening of Thursday 13 May 2021. It is a joyous occasion and a day of true thanksgiving for Muslims. The day begins with giving to charity and prayers in the Mosque, and thereafter Muslims share celebratory meals with family and friends and exchange gifts. As with the start of Ramadan, the exact date of Eid is also dependent on the sighting of the moon.

Guidance for Managers

What are the obligations of Muslims in Ramadan?

There are five basic Pillars of Islam. These pillars are the declaration of faith, praying five times a day, giving money to charity, a pilgrimage to Mecca on at least one occasion and fasting during the month of Ramadan. All able-bodied adult Muslims must give up the following things during the hours of daylight:

- Food or drink of any sort (including water)
- Smoking
- Sexual activity

Fasting has significance beyond not eating and drinking; Ramadan is intended to increase self-control in all aspects of life. The aim is to be a moral human being during the fast, hoping that the good behaviours practiced during the month will become virtuous habits for life. Muslims will therefore try to give up negative habits during Ramadan, and many will pray, read and reflect upon the Qur'an more.

During Ramadan most Muslims will wake before dawn for a meal (Suhoor). When daylight is over, they will traditionally break the fast by eating dates (although any food will do) and water and a meal thereafter. As Ramadan falls within the spring/summer period this year, for most people the end of the fast will fall outside working hours, however this also means that those who are

observing Ramadan could be getting considerably less sleep due to additional prayers and the pre-dawn (Suhoor) meal. When Ramadan falls during the warmer months, days are longer and nights are shorter, which means that staff are fasting for extended periods in warmer weather.

While many Muslims increase their worship during this month, the majority also continue with their normal duties as usual. Muslim staff / key workers may wish to have some flexibility within their work arrangements if it can be accommodated within the operations of the business. If this is the case, flexible arrangements should be agreed and granted in accordance with local flexible working policy, and staff members. This may be particularly important for companies where Muslim employees are doing shift work which may affect their fast.

Staff may also wish to take annual leave during Ramadan or to celebrate Eid. Requests for leave should be handled in the usual way and managers should have regard for the spiritual aspect of Ramadan. It is advisable to consider all aspects, both religious and operational, when granting leave. Staff may also wish to take leave for half the day and these requests should be treated in the same way.

Staff may wish to complete prayers that fall during the working day at work. This would involve time to complete the ablution (wudu) and pray (salah). Prayers should normally take

no more than 15 minutes on average, although this can vary slightly. The ritual wash (wudu) is the Islamic procedure for washing parts of the body using water often in preparation for formal prayers (salah).

Muslims are also required to be clean when handling and reading the Qur'an. Theoretically, one can perform one wudu for salah and this wudu would be considered valid for the rest of the day. However, certain acts invalidate the wudu (often referred to as "breaking wudu") and these can be stated generically as: - Defecation, passing wind or urination - Sleep while reclining - Vomiting - Loss of senses - Fainting - Smoking - The loss of blood or other bodily fluids.

Multi-faith prayer rooms are offered within certain organisations. Where prayer space is not routinely available, managers may wish to consider providing a temporary space if convenient. Facilities to perform ablution should also be considered where possible. Any clean, quiet space can be used by Muslims to pray as long as the area does not have any pictures of people or animals in it. If it does, these will need to be covered for a Muslim to be able to pray in the area. It is also ideal to have a prayer mat but not a necessity, as any clean sheet can be used to pray on.

Managers should talk to staff intending to fast in order to resolve any possible concerns. To facilitate effective working relationships within teams, managers may also wish to use

this guidance to brief other managers and/or team members.

It is also essential to note that not all Muslims will fast - some due to sickness or ill health and others for personal reasons. This should be respected and care should be taken not to offend people who are not fasting by asking for reasons as to why they are not fasting - nor should an assumption be made that a person from the Islamic faith is fasting. Other considerations Working lunches – It is helpful for colleagues to be mindful of holding meetings over lunch where Muslim colleagues are not able to also join in and eat during Ramadan. However, this does not mean that special arrangements have to be made to ensure that no one eats in front of someone who is fasting, but merely a consideration that should be taken if possible.

Training courses – When organising training courses during Ramadan be mindful of any participants who are fasting, especially if a physical element is included.

Team away days – Fasting staff members may not wish to attend social events and lunches during Ramadan.

What are the implications for employers?

Ramadan is of major significance to Muslims and, since the period of fast is around 15-16 hours each day this year, there are a number

of practical issues that employers should consider:

- Know your team. There are almost 3 million Muslims in the UK. Whilst this is just under 5% of the total UK population, there are considerable variations across the country, and a number of urban areas have substantially higher concentrations. If you have a large number of employees, it is likely that you will have some members of staff who will be observing Ramadan.
 - Making it clear that you are aware that Ramadan is approaching and are sensitive to the obligations it presents for some staff will encourage people to come to you if they need an adjustment to their normal working pattern or need any other support.
 - Be aware that some Muslims who may not be observant during the rest of the year may observe Ramadan.
 - Raise awareness Ensure that all employees, and in particular managers, know when Ramadan is and the impact it has on those observing it. An awareness raising campaign can have a positive impact on all staff and reduce the risk of tension or misunderstandings. This can be as simple as talking about Ramadan in team meetings and offering meetings with anyone who would like to talk about any support they need or issues they might have.
- Consider small adjustments. In most cases only slight adjustments to the working day will be needed and could include:
 - Working with employees to accommodate flexible working arrangements during this period, such as allowing Muslim staff to start work early or to work a late shift or a night shift. However, this should be considered if it is operationally feasible and does not cause problems for other employees and the organisation. Please be aware that staff must have a minimum 20-minute break during their working day if they work for more than six hours, as per EU Working Time Regulations.
 - Avoiding arranging 'working lunches', physically demanding events etc. If these events are necessary, try to arrange them as early in the day as possible as that will probably be the best time for Muslim staff to perform their duties and when they will have the most energy to carry out the tasks.
 - Where practical, refreshment times should coincide with the breaking of the fast (Iftar) which will occur around 8.30-9pm. If operationally it is not possible for a staff member to have a break at the time of breaking the fast, it is possible for them to

break the fast initially with something sweet, usually a date and a glass of water. However, do consider that the staff member hasn't eaten or had a drink all day and therefore it is advisable to arrange a break for them as soon as possible so they can eat a proper meal. If possible, try to be flexible about work required after sunset.

- Some Muslims may wish to take leave from work at the end of Ramadan for Eid-ul-Fitr. Employers should recognise that such requests may be presented with little advance notice since the actual day that Eid falls on will depend on when the new moon is sighted. However, at the beginning of Ramadan they will have a fairly good idea of a few dates on which Eid may fall and should be able to give at least a couple of weeks' notice. This leave is normally taken from the employee's holiday entitlement or, where applicable, as unpaid leave. The challenge that line managers face is to ensure that operational commitments are met while still valuing the diversity of employees.
- Line managers should discuss rosters with staff at the earliest opportunity to ensure this balance is maintained. Generally, there will not be a need to amend any rosters. If

employees who are fasting are operating machinery, driving vehicles etc, health and safety should be considered. It would be advisable to let fasting employees complete these tasks as early in the day as possible, as near to the end of the day they will have less energy and may find it more difficult to concentrate. It should also be borne in mind that staff that are fasting could be weak from hunger and/or thirst and be suffering lethargy, particularly nearing sunset, which may impact on their performance.

General issues

There can often be different start dates for Ramadan and Eid itself. This is due to differing interpretation of Islamic text. The concept of the sighting of the moon marking the beginning of the month is followed; however, the differences appear on whether the sights should be those in Saudi Arabia or those of the host country.

Consequently, some Muslims decide to follow direction from Saudi Arabia and some follow directions from UK-based centres, which sometimes results in different days being identified. During Ramadan, there is likely to be an increase in activity around Muslim households.

Much of this activity will be around Suhoor, before sunrise, when people wake up to start the fast and eat. This will be around 4.30-5am. There will also be an increase in activity when the fast ends at about 8.30-9pm. Some community centres, mosques and restaurants may hold events at these times.

The last 10 days of Ramadan usually see the largest increase in activity in and around Mosques and Islamic Cultural Centres, particularly during the evening and on Fridays. There is also likely to be an increase in the number of Muslims travelling to Mecca for the Umrah pilgrimage (a 'mini' pilgrimage or prelude to Hajj). Individuals can use this period as a time for contemplation and prayer. It can also mean that some will elect to stay in the Mosque or their home for this period and cut themselves from daily life. They will devote themselves to reading the Quran.

During Ramadan, Friday prayers (known as Jum'a) are of particular importance. Muslims are required by their faith to pray at this time. This will normally occur around 1pm and last for approximately 45 minutes. Prayers should be conducted at a local Mosque. Line managers should look favourably in allowing their staff to attend the Mosque during this period – perhaps during their lunch break or look at flexibility with the timing of lunch.

Apart from Jum'a prayers, the remaining prayers do not have to be undertaken at a Mosque, but they must be performed. The

timings of the most frequent request will be around 1pm and 9pm.

Prayers should last no more than 15 minutes each as mentioned previously. These requests should be permitted where possible, but this will be at the line manager's discretion.

There is also a window of time when Muslims can pray a prayer. Although it is advisable to pray the prayers at the time allocated, Muslims have until the next prayer time to pray the prayer.

However please note that Friday prayers will have to be at the time of the prayer as these prayers are prayed at a Mosque and in congregation. Eid-ul-Fitr in the Muslim calendar is comparable to Christmas in the Christian calendar. There is normally only a two or three day window when Eid-ul-Fitr is celebrated.

Please note that Eid-ul-Fitr is usually announced the night before as it is dependent on the sighting of the moon. There are a number of websites that can provide you with timetables for Ramadan this year. The fast will start at Fajr (dawn prayer) and it will end during Maghrib (prayer at sunset).

Please note that the Islamic calendar is based on the lunar phases and there may be slight variation in the dates provided, as well timings for different regions.

Guidance for Muslim Staff

Take personal responsibility for ensuring that neither business needs nor your own needs are unnecessarily jeopardised.

Talk to your line manager as early as possible to facilitate flexibility on both sides. You should come to a mutual agreement with your line manager about the times you wish to spend in prayer.

As prayer is a personal matter, if you take time to pray outside of usual break times (e.g. lunch hour), you will need to make this time up later. If you are attending interviews, training courses or other events, take responsibility to notify people of your needs. If you feel weak or unwell at work, inform your line manager as soon as possible.

When requesting days off for religious observance, give your line manager as much notice as possible, even if only an estimation of the dates can be provided prior to the

sighting of the new moon. You should use annual or flexi leave, or a combination of both. You must have sufficient holiday entitlement in hand. Your manager is likely to be balancing multiple leave requests as well as operational needs, so you should be prepared to be flexible.

This document has been adapted from the National Association of Muslim Police and we would like to thank Asif Sadiq for his collaboration. It has been produced by taking into consideration a number of different Islamic views and a number of Imams. However, it must be noted that not all views will be the same and certain Muslims will have differing views then those contained in the document. It is worth remembering that this is a guidance document only.