

# Supporting our Muslim colleagues during Ramadan 2024

Information and resources for distribution to line managers and staff

BLMK ICB/ ICS



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# NHS Staff During Ramadan

- Many NHS staff who are Muslim and observe fasting during Ramadan, will participate in a daily period of fasting, starting at sunrise and finishing at sunset over the month. This means abstaining from food, drink (including water) and smoking. While fasting is an important part of Ramadan, it is also a time of **self-reflection** and **self-evaluation** for Muslims.
- Accommodating religious belief and practices during Ramadan is about **being responsive** to employees' needs. It does not necessarily mean extra time off; it is about offering flexibility around existing holiday entitlement, working patterns or break periods.



# What is Ramadan?



- Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic (lunar) calendar and is **one of the holiest months of the year** for Muslims. Ramadan is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community. It also marks the first revelation of the holy Quran to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The annual observance of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam and lasts twenty-nine to thirty days, from one sighting of the crescent moon to the next

# Why do Muslims fast in Ramadan?



- The primary purpose of this month is to improve God consciousness. It is a time of spiritual reflection, self-improvement and worship when Muslims draw closer to God. This 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. Through fasting this allows the individual to understand and increase empathy for those less fortunate around the world who live their lives in poverty. The **intention is for the fasting person to feel more grounded and grateful**. The most known and recognised action in this month is fasting, which is an obligatory act for all Muslims, if they are able to fast.

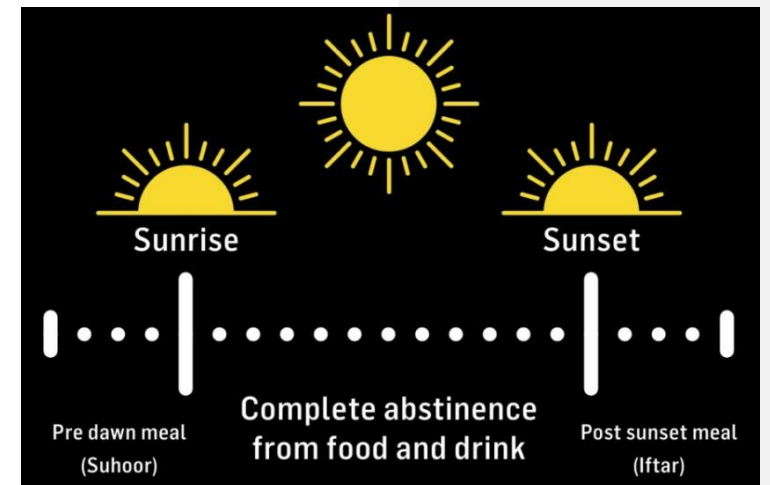
# When is Ramadan?

- 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 the 11<sup>th</sup> March, concluding on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024 depending on the sighting of the new moon and lunar cycle; Eid-ul-Fitr is likely to be on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024 again depending on the sighting of the moon and lunar cycle.



# 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.
- 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.



# 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 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

- 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.



# 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:





# Tips for supporting NHS Muslim staff and colleagues throughout the month of Ramadan

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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).

# Tips for supporting NHS Muslim staff and colleagues throughout the month of Ramadan - continued

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

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. chat box function rather than talking in meetings.

Workplace adjustments should not impact negatively on delivery outcomes (including direct patient care). Managers and their staff can discuss and consider options such as 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.

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.

There is uncertainty around what day Eid will fall on 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.

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. NHS England have developed a prayer guidance for NHS staff and managers to increase awareness. A link to this is at the end of this pack

# Advice for Employers

- 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.
- 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 or 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.
- Employers are asked to be mindful when scheduling meetings/ gatherings/ interviews during this time. It may be useful to check with colleagues if any special requests need to be considered.



# Advice for colleagues who are fasting



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.



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.



# Advice for colleagues who are fasting - continued

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 teamworking).

Try to ensure that you take regular breaks throughout the day, and where possible, get some fresh air at these times.



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.

# Advice for colleagues who are fasting - continued

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



If you are not well 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.

The NHS Muslim Network is a national staff network, supported by NHS England, that aims to represent, support, and provide a voice for Muslim colleagues, allies, and friends within the NHS. Connect with other Muslims and allies by tuning into the NHS Muslim Network's virtual webinars during the month of Ramadan. Details of how to contact them can be found at the end of this pack



# End of Ramadan: Eid ul Fitr

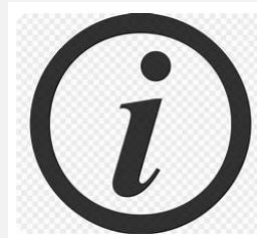
The **end** of Ramadan is celebrated with **Eid-ul-Fitr** – the festival of “fast-breaking”. On the morning of Eid, Muslims go to the mosque for a special prayer. This is usually followed by visits to families and friends, exchanging gifts and socialising.



Eid-ul-Fitr is likely to be on 10th April 2024 again depending on the sighting of the moon and lunar cycle.







# Resources

## Prayer guidance for NHS staff and managers

- The guidance is to increase awareness around Islamic prayers and flexibility during working hours. It has been prepared in the spirit of creating an inclusive workplace that respects the beliefs and practices of its Muslim staff.
- The guidance is geared towards non-clinical NHS settings in particular.
- <https://nhsmuslimnetwork.co.uk/prayer-time-guidance>

## Diabetes and Ramadan

- This page has information for people living with diabetes who are thinking about fasting for Ramadan.
- Factsheets are available at [Diabetes and Ramadan | Fasting | Diabetes UK](#)

## NHS Muslim Network

- The NHS Muslim Network is a national staff network, supported by NHS England, that aims to represent, support, and provide a voice for Muslim colleagues, allies, and friends within the NHS.
- All work undertaken by the NHS Muslim Network is in alignment with the NHS People Promise, in particular “We are compassionate and inclusive”.
- To find out more about the network, please visit [NHS Muslim Network – Supporting Muslim colleagues, allies and friends in the NHS](#) or you can email [england.muslim1@nhs.net](mailto:england.muslim1@nhs.net)

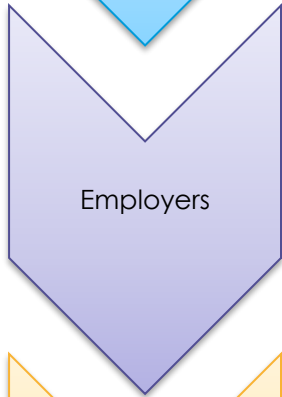


# Resources



Supporting Muslim staff and colleagues in Ramadan

- NHS Muslim Network are hosting a number of events during these weeks. For further information please see details on their support package at - [Support Package – NHS Muslim Network](#) Here you will find details on
  - Webinars (Ramadan awareness, Healthy eating & exercise in Ramadan, Zakaat workshop)
  - In person Iftar (breaking of the fast)
  - #NHSRamadanChallenge
  - In-person Eid Al-Fitr Celebration Event



Employers

- Muslim Friendly Employers have produced some resources about how you can support your Muslim employees in the workplace
  - [Resources — Muslim Friendly Employers](#)
- Inclusive Employers blog explains more about what Ramadan is and provides expert advice on how to support Muslims at work
  - [Supporting Muslims at Work in Ramadan | Inclusive Employers](#)



Ramadan Health factsheet

- Ramadan Health Factsheet from the Muslim Council of Britain - [MCB Ramadan Health Guide | Muslim Council of Britain](#)
- British Nutrition Foundation, In this section you can read about food and nutrition during the holy month of Ramadan.- [A healthy Ramadan - British Nutrition Foundation](#)