

Ramadan Factsheet

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar and is considered one of the most spiritual times of the year for Muslims. It signifies the time during which the Qur'an was revealed and is the holy month of fasting. This factsheet provides an overview, context, and awareness raising for employers to ensure they understand the needs of their Muslim colleagues during this important holy month.

When is Ramadan 2024?

This year, Ramadan is approximately expected to begin on the evening of Sunday 10th March, with Monday 11th March marking the first day, and ends on the evening of Tuesday 9th April. 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, with the aforementioned Ramadan dates in mind, Wednesday 10th April will mark the day of Eid – again, the exact date can vary slightly as this will be in accordance with the sighting of the moon.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the name of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Ramadan has various spellings and pronunciation depending on region and language, e.g.: Ramazaan, Ramzaan, and various other iterations are commonly used throughout varying languages and dialects.

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 (known as Suhoor) and break their fast (known as Iftar) with dates and water at sunset, and then a meal.

The length of the fasting varies from country to country and season to season due to it being in relation to sunrise and sunset. The start and end times then 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; those during their monthly cycle; those who are pregnant and those who are breastfeeding.

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.

Eid-ul-Fitr

This is the festival which marks the end of Ramadan. 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.

Common greetings

Below is a selection of common greetings you can use to share your well wishes with your Muslim colleagues during Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr:

- 'Ramadan Mubarak' – meaning 'Blessed Ramadan'
- 'Ramadan Kareem' – meaning 'Noble Ramadan' or 'Have a generous Ramadan'
- 'Kul 'am wa enta bi-khair' – meaning 'May every year find you in good health' or 'I wish you well on this occasion every year'
- 'Eid Mubarak' – meaning 'Blessed Eid'

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
- Fasting during the month of Ramadan

All non-disabled 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.

Working hours and duties

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 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 organisation. If

this is the case, flexible arrangements should be agreed and granted in accordance with the organisation's 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.

Annual leave

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.

Fasting

Managers should talk to employees 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.

Ablution and prayer

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 vary and can normally take around 15 minutes on average, although this can fluctuate 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 are: defecation; passing wind or urination; sleep while reclining; vomiting; loss of senses; fainting; smoking; and 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. 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.

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
- 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

Implications for employers

Ramadan is of major significance to Muslims and, since the period of fast is around 11-14 hours each day this year, there are a number of practical issues that employers should consider:

Consider the workforce

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 metropolitan

areas have substantially higher concentrations. If an organisation has a large number of employees, it is likely that some members of staff will be observing Ramadan.

Be aware of individual differences

Some Muslims who may not be observant during the rest of the year may observe Ramadan.

Make it clear that Ramadan is approaching

Being sensitive to the obligations it presents for some staff will encourage people to reach out to line managers if they need an adjustment to their normal working pattern or need any other support.

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. If it is operationally feasible and does not cause problems for other employees and the organisation, this should be considered. 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
- Avoid 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). 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 will not have 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
- Line managers should discuss rosters with staff at the earliest opportunity to ensure this balance is maintained. 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 considered that employees who are fasting could be weak from hunger and/or thirst and be suffering lethargy, particularly nearing sunset, which may impact on their performance.

Resources:

<https://www.muslimaid.org/what-we-do/religious-dues/when-is-ramadan/>

<https://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/giving/islamic-giving/ramadan/ramadan-timetable/>