

Ramadan during COVID-19

A guide for staff, volunteers and managers

This year will be very different for staff and volunteers who are Muslim and observe fasting during Ramadan. This guide covers:

- What happens during Ramadan
- Fasting during COVID-19
- Availability of food for fasting staff and volunteers Prayer facilities
- Leave requests
- Contacts for further advice
- External resources.

All staff, volunteers and managers need to be made aware of this guide.

1. What happens during Ramadan

- 1.1. In 2020, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan starts around Thursday 23 April, ending around Saturday 23 May with Eid-ul-Fitr, a day of celebration.
- 1.2. Ramadan is a time for spiritual reflection and prayer. It involves a daily period of fasting starting at sunrise and finishing at sunset over the month, about 18 hours a day this year.
- 1.3. Fasting starts with people waking up before dawn to eat and to pray, called "Suhur"; and finishing their food and drink just before hearing the call for the dawn prayer and thus the day of fasting begins. They will continue the day with two further prayers. The fourth prayer will be at sunset when they break their fast, called "Iftar".

2. Fasting during COVID-19

- 2.1. Fasting during COVID-19 presents some challenges, including :
 - Fasting whilst in full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which includes the FFP3 mask or powered air respirators
 - Dehydration and heat stress
 - Longer shifts
 - Due to waking up early to eat before sunrise and prayers staff and volunteers may be a little more tired than usual.

2.2. Fasting and PPE

PPE which includes the FFP3 mask or powered air respirators can result in dehydration and heat stress due to the necessarily tight fit around the face and extensive periods for which it is likely to be worn for compared with normal surgical masks. It may be difficult to keep the fast particularly if the shift is busy.

If it is not possible to fast, the fasts can be postponed to a later date. This is a judgement staff and volunteers need to make on a personal level based on their health whilst keeping in mind their duty of care to patients.

2.3. Staff and volunteers with medical conditions

Staff and volunteers with some medical conditions need to manage their fast safely. For example, staff and volunteers who treat their diabetes with insulin

or have diabetic complications. There is also the danger of the blood glucose levels becoming too high when normal levels of medication are not taken. Staff with medical conditions are urged to ensure if it is safe for them to fast

2.4. There are groups of people and circumstances where Muslims may be exempt from fasting, though whether to fast remains a personal decision. These include:

- Children (under the age of puberty)
- Older people
- People with medical conditions
- Those who are travelling long distances
- Pregnant, breastfeeding and menstruating women.

2.5. Advice for staff and volunteers

The decisions about fasting are made by staff and volunteer. Given the particular challenges that fasting presents this year, staff and volunteers are invited to evaluate their own position and make a judgement. Some solutions to managing fasting during COVID-19 include:

- Lower your threshold of breaking the fast if you feel you cannot complete
- Fast alternative days
- Postpone fasts until a later date in the year
- Consider Fidyah, this is compensation in Islam for a missed act of worship that must be otherwise fulfilled
- Consider requesting changing shift pattern e.g. night shifts, shorter shifts.
- Seek guidance and support from Imams
- Whatever decision you make, let your manager and colleagues know so they can support you where they can.

2.6. Advice for managers

Given the particular challenges that fasting presents this year during COVID-19, managers are asked to have a conversation with their staff and volunteers who are planning to fast to support them. The following considerations have been provided to support managers have these conversations.

- Assess the impact of longer shifts on staff who are fasting
- Consider flexible working or changing shift rotas to accommodate breaking the fast at the end of each day
- As far as possible, allow meal breaks at different times, for example lunch breaks at dusk to coincide with breaking the fast

- Consider allowing time off to pray, especially at sunset
- Where possible, arrange for meetings, training and other important tasks to be held in the mornings when staff energy levels are likely to be higher
- Communicate with team members about what fasting entails and the effect on colleagues taking part in Ramadan.

3. Availability of food for fasting staff members at Iftar

- 3.1. Iftar is the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset. To support staff who will be fasting, the Charity Team and #TeamMFT are creating Iftar bags with non-perishable items such as dates. Where to access the Iftar bags will be publicised later in April in MFT iNews and COVID communications.

Requesting meals out of normal meal timings for fasting patients.

At Oxford Road Campus:

- Phone Sodexo Helpdesk 4850 or the Eye Café 17311 with your request for a meal.
- Halal snack boxes are available 24/7. They contain meat or vegetable sandwiches (cold), fruit juice, yogurt and cheese and crackers.
- Staff to collect food from the Eye Café.

At Wythenshawe Campus:

- Phone Sodexo Helpdesk 4530 with your request for a snack box.
- Halal snack boxes are available 24/7. They contain meat or vegetable sandwiches (cold), packet of crisps, yogurt/fruit or cheese and crackers.
- Snack boxes will be delivered to the ward by night porter.

4. Prayer facilities

Muslims are encouraged to pray five times. Staff and volunteers may perform additional prayers during the month of Ramadan. The availability of prayer facilities across sites:

- Multi-faith and Muslim prayer rooms are currently open. You must follow Public Health England COVID-19 guidance on social distancing and MFT local protocol for infection prevention and control. There are markings on the floor of the multi-faith rooms to indicate two meter social distance.

- You must use disposal paper towels for prayers to reduce any risk of infection
- You must use your own prayer mat
- Managers, staff and volunteers may also want to explore the possibility of a temporary space for prayer / reflection.

5. Leave requests

5.1. Eid marks the end of Ramadan and is celebrated for up to three days. This year it will begin on or just after 23rd May depending on the sighting of the moon. Staff and volunteers may want to book leave to celebrate Eid but will not know much in advance of the actual Eid date due to the sighting of the new moon.

5.2. Staff and volunteer guidance

In response to COVID-19, staff and volunteers are required more than ever before. You may be asked for some flexibility in relation to planned leave for Eid to ensure that operational requirements are met with a collective effort to support one another and to ensure our essential services and safe patient care are maintained.

5.3. Manager guidance

These are unprecedented times when capacity is needed more than ever. However, as a supportive employer, the Trust aims to accommodate these requests wherever possible. Where several requests are made from within the same work team, you need to discuss the matter with staff and volunteers affected. Accommodating religious belief and practices does not mean allowing extra time off; it means being flexible about employees' existing holiday entitlement, working patterns or breaks period.

6. Contacts for further advice:

7. Oxford Road Campus and Wythenshawe Campus

- Chaplaincy / spiritual care: chaplain@mft.nhs.uk
- Equality and diversity: equality@mft.nhs.uk
- HR: askhr@mft.nhs.uk

8. North Manchester General Hospital:

[Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Team](#) (click to follow link)

9. External resources

Several organisations have developed useful guidance to help both managers and staff during Ramadan, these include:

- NHS England and NHS Improvement: <https://people.nhs.uk/guides/covid-19-and-ramadan/>
- People Management: <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/experts/legal/hr-guide-to-ramadan>
- NHS Employers: <https://www.nhsemployers.org/news/2020/04/ramadan-2020>
- Muslim Association of Britain: <https://www.mabonline.net/about/branch/>
- Muslim Council of Britain: <https://mcb.org.uk>
- <https://islamicportal.co.uk/fasting-in-ramadan-for-covid-19-doctors-and-nurses/>