



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION REGIONAL OFFICE FOR AFRICA SUPPORTS THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

# Safe Ramadan practices in the context of the COVID-19

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## Background

The Holy Month of Ramadan is marked by religious and social gatherings where Muslim communities pray together, in principle five times a day and break their fast with family and friends after sunset during iftar or before dawn during suhour. For prayers, the majority of Muslims go to the mosque during the Month of Ramadan. During taraweeh and qiyam hey, Muslims congregate for long prayers. There are Muslims who also spend consecutive days and nights at the mosque during the last 10 days of Ramadan (i'tikaf) for prayers. These religious practices are regularly observed throughout the month. Furthermore, at the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrates the Eid al-Fitr which is also a religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide.

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an urgent need to re-examine practices during Ramadan that are likely to contribute to transmission of the virus. These practices require the implementation of mitigation measures known to reduce transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19. The following are standard measures taken to reduce the transmission of COVID-19:

- Physical distancing aimed at interrupting transmission by reducing close interaction among worshippers;
- Washing of hands with clean water and soap before and at the end of prayer meetings;
- Using sanitizers with an alcohol base to clean hands; and
- Using the flexed elbow each time one sneezes or coughs.

During Ramadan, additional measures are required for the prevention and control of COVID-19. To agree on these measures, a collective decision-making process involving the leadership of the Muslim community and Government is required. The decisions to be taken include the closing of mosques, monitoring of public gatherings and restrictions on people's movement. These decisions will have direct implications on the religious and other social gatherings of large groups of people which is synonymous with Ramadan. It is therefore prudent that Muslim religious leaders and Government engage early in decision-making to make communities aware of the important decisions relating to COVID-19 mitigation measures during Ramadan. The mitigation measures also require that a communication strategy be developed to sensitize individuals, households and communities on the agreed actions that will be enforced during Ramadan to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## The following are required actions to be promoted in the home during Ramadan:

- Observe the five daily prayers at home with close members of your family and always keep a distance of at least 1 meter (3 feet) between people;
- Utilize virtual media platforms such as television, radio, digital and social media for the five daily prayers;
- Avoid physical contact when greeting by using methods that are culturally and religiously appropriate such as waving, nodding, or placing the hand over the heart;
- Urge people who are feeling unwell or have any symptoms of COVID-19 to avoid praying with other members of the family or in public spaces;
- Ensure that hand washing facilities are adequately equipped with soap and water, and provide alcohol-based hand-rubs (at least 70% alcohol) at the entrance to, and inside mosques;
- Ensure the availability of disposable tissue and bins with disposable liners and lids, and guarantee the safe disposal of waste;
- Encourage the use of personal prayer rugs to place over carpets.

## If religious mass gathering is permitted by government, continue to promote the following:

- Consider holding the event outdoors if possible; otherwise, ensure that the indoor venue has adequate ventilation and air flow;
- Shorten the length of the event as much as possible to limit potential exposure;
- Give preference to holding smaller services with fewer attendees more often, rather than hosting large gatherings;
- Adhere to physical distancing among attendees, both when seated and standing, through creating and assigning fixed places, including when praying, performing wudu (ritual ablutions) in communal washing facilities, as well as in areas dedicated to shoe storage;
- Regulate the number and flow of people entering, attending, and departing from worship spaces, pilgrimage sites, or other venues to ensure safe distancing at all times;
- Consider measures to facilitate contact tracing in the event that an ill person is identified among the attendees of the event;
- Enforce routine cleaning of venues where people gather before and after each event, using detergents and disinfectants;

- In mosques, keep the premises and wudu facilities clean, and maintain general hygiene and sanitation;
- Frequently clean often-touched objects such as doorknobs, light switches, and stair railings with detergents and disinfectant; and
- Keep no-touch thermometers (Thermoflash) at the venue in case there is need to check temperature;
- Encourage use of hand sanitizers/washing hands with soap before entering worship spaces and participating in religious gathering.