



Joint Statement from the National Muslim Task Force on COVID-19 Regarding Ramadan

April 23, 2020

Summary

The holy month of Ramadan is incredibly significant to Muslims in America and around the globe; it is a time of spiritual purification, social service, special rituals of communal meals, daytime fasting and nightly vigils of prayer. This year Muslims will need to modify their practices in light of the public health hazards COVID-19 presents. In accordance with recommendations from public health and religious authorities, the National Muslim COVID-19 Task Force strongly advises Muslim American communities to practice Ramadan in a safe, yet spiritually uplifting, manner. Preserving both human life as well as preserving religion are agreed-upon essential higher objectives of Islamic law, and the guidance and recommendations provided herein balance these core end-goals. We thus strongly recommend:

1. **Households, community organizations, and individuals should continue to follow public health and state authority guidance.** Specifically they should continue the practice of physical distancing and adhere to restrictions on public gatherings.
2. **Mosques and Islamic centers should adhere to local regulations about public gatherings, and as such not establish communal night vigils (taraweeh/qiyam ul-layl).** Rather these Ramadan-related prayers can be performed by families and individuals in their own residences.
3. **Individuals and corporations should donate their obligatory and non-obligatory alms (zakat and sadaqah)** to organizations that are working on the front-lines to support those impacted, directly or indirectly, by the pandemic both within the United States and abroad.
4. **Individuals upon whom Ramadan fasting is obligatory should fast, and those who have legitimate exemptions to or face credible hardship should exercise the appropriate option of feeding others or making up fasts** based on their personal circumstances and in consultation with Islamic authorities.

For more information on National Muslim COVID-19 Taskforce, visit <https://amhp.us/national-muslim-task-force> or email covid@amhp.us. For additional community resources, visit <http://www.imana.org/covid-19>

Background

Historical precedent from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) and ethico-legal precedents from other chapters in Muslim civilizational history document instances where threats to life and security have led to the suspension of congregational prayers, adaptations to religious rites related to burial and funeral, and curtailing of pilgrimage to the sacred mosques in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an analogous situation as it threatens both individual life and societal well-being. Indeed, public health guidance from reputable agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization, which in turn draws upon clinical and epidemiological data from across the globe underscores the grave risks COVID-19 presents. It is a highly infectious disease that spreads easily from one individual to another, even before its symptoms become manifest. It is a disease with high morbidity and mortality; the majority of those who become infected will be ill for days to weeks, and a small minority particularly those with chronic health issues (high blood pressure, immunocompromising states, lung disease) can die from it. Indeed COVID-19 has already claimed the lives of over 175,000 individuals. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the loved ones of these recently departed. **At present we neither have a vaccine to protect against the disease, nor a treatment to cure it.** Consequently public health measures such as washing our hands, social distancing and the like are key to combating COVID-19. We as Muslims are called to recognize these realities by, in the words of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) “tying it and trusting [in God]”, in other words to take appropriate precautions whilst trusting in God’s providential plan.

Recommendations

While state authorities may differ in their specific regulations, Islamic jurists and juridical councils may differ in their religious rulings and undergirding rationale, and the COVID-19 prevalence varies from locale to locale, the National Muslim COVID-19 Taskforce aligns various positions to make recommendations that draw upon areas of convergence and can be broadly applied within the US. As with our [first statement](#) issued on March 19, 2020, the recommendations herein are provisional in light of the rapidly changing clinical and societal circumstances. We have four principal recommendations:

1. Households, community organizations, and individuals should continue to follow public health and state authority guidelines guidance. Specifically they should continue to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the month of Ramadan by practicing social distancing and adhering to restrictions on public gatherings.

This means that shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders, as well as the shuttering of non-essential businesses and restrictions on public gatherings for social, religious, or civic events, must be adhered to. The Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA) explicitly states that “*its legal stance hinges on the government mandates and the guidance of the relevant public health agencies...AMJA requires Muslims to follow the updates of the CDC and comply with its instructions.*” Similarly, the Fiqh Council of North America emphasizes “*that masajids and Islamic centers shall strictly follow the health and state official guidelines for social gatherings and distancing.*” A similar sentiment to follow instructions and regulations from state and public health authorities is voiced by Chicagoland ulema and Shura councils across the US. Aside from restrictions regarding mosque-based worship (see below), Muslim families and organizations are advised to not host public social gatherings for breaking the fast (iftar). Rather we recommend families to break their fasts at home with loved ones and use that time to make extra supplication for well-being and removal of the plight of COVID-19 from humanity, and that organizations prepare food boxes for take out so that those who need iftar meals can safely pick them up.

2. Mosques and Islamic centers should adhere to local regulations about public gatherings, and as such not establish communal night vigils (taraweeh/qiyam ul-layl).

While under normal circumstances many Muslims traditionally observe Ramadan night vigil prayers communally at mosques, during the COVID-19 pandemic this highly recommended practice of night vigil prayer can be prayed individually or in familial congregation within one’s home. Indeed the Prophet Muhammad’s (saw) performed these prayers in public as well as in private. Accordingly, we encourage establishing such prayers in one’s home with one’s immediate family. Aside from mosques not hosting

public night vigil prayers, Muslims should not invite others from outside of their household to perform such prayers, as that would counter guidance to socially distance as much as possible. This recommendation coheres with the FCNA edict which notes that *"Taraweeh prayers shall be performed at home within a family setting just like the regular daily Jama'ah,"* and similar sentiments expressed by other councils and preeminent scholars within the United States.

3. Individuals and corporations should donate their obligatory and non-obligatory alms (zakat and sadaqah) to organizations that are working on the front-lines to support those impacted, directly or indirectly, by the pandemic both within the United States and abroad.

Given the multiple-fold rewards of performing good deeds in the blessed month of Ramadan, and the enhanced closeness Muslims feel towards the under-privileged, impoverished, and marginalized segments of society during this month, Muslim charitable giving increases substantially during this month. We recommend that Muslims implement the Prophetic directive to "heal/treat your ill folk by means of charitable giving." In other words, Muslims should align their charitable giving towards efforts that are combating the pandemic directly or indirectly. There are many organizations, both Muslim and non-Muslim, supporting efforts to combat the disease and caring for the ill. There are also many organizations servicing the needs of the many who have been left without sustenance, shelter, and the like because of the severe measures needed to control the pandemic. In Ramadan, the Prophet Muhammad (saw) increased in his generosity, and as such, we encourage Muslims to emulate his example.

4. Individuals upon whom Ramadan fasting is obligatory should fast, and those who have legitimate exemptions to or face credible hardship should exercise the appropriate option of feeding others or making up fasts based on their personal circumstances and in consultation with Islamic authorities.

The Qur'an itself declares fasting to be a religious obligation, but also declares "whoever is ill or is on a journey" can postpone fasting and make up the fasts "on alternative days" [2:185]. Similarly, Islamic law recognizes hardship and infirmity-related exemptions from fasting and prescribes expiation or making up fasting based on personal circumstances. Regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic, these religious laws apply to Ramadan fasting and each individual should consider their own situation. With respect to the pandemic, expert medical guidance and data, including from the WHO, suggest no added risk of infectivity towards COVID-19 due to fasting. Hence healthy people should be able to fast during this Ramadan as in previous years, and are obligated to do so. "New" questions have arisen about hardship-related exemptions from fasting for front-line workers who might experience excessive malaise and weakness, or cognitive decline in decision-making where other's lives hang in the balance. For such workers it is suggested that they attempt to fast, and if they experience such extenuating difficulties, they may decide to break the fast and postpone to a future date. Again this recommendation aligns with scholarly views, including AMJA's ruling that "fear of possibly contracting the coronavirus is not a valid excuse that would warrant someone a concession to break his/her fast. However, the concession remains available for the one who is physically harmed by fasting."

Closing Remarks

Beyond the specific recommendations noted above, the Taskforce offers some general advice as Muslim engage with Ramadan. The month of Ramadan is a month of immense bounties and blessings, and brings special attention from the Divine. Muslims should avail themselves of these incredible opportunities while not letting our steadfastness and precautions related to COVID-19 spread lapse.

While this pandemic continues to disrupt our daily lives and religious practices, we must continue to be vigilant to ensure the safety of our families, neighbors, and communities. We should ensure proper nutrition and hydration by eating fresh and unprocessed foods and drinking plenty of water. As we enjoy our meals and confront the pangs of hunger, we should consider the plight of those stricken by food insecurity and assist wherever and however we can. At the same time for both physical and mental health purposes, it is important to have some physical activity. Where authorities allow, we should make a habit of going outdoors in nature for limited physical activities whilst practicing physical distancing and with proper face mask and hand hygiene. If exercise outdoors is not possible or practical, a daily habit of indoor physical activity is advised. Finally, it is important to maintain connections with loved ones and friends during these difficult times. We encourage, as was the practice of the Companions and scholars thereafter, for families to gather for communal supplications and break their fasts together. In this day and age, digital and telephonic platforms make such gatherings possible virtually as well. Remember to check-in with loved ones near and far, we will get through COVID-19 together.

The National Muslim COVID-19 Taskforce prays that Allah (swt) facilitate our lives and practices in this month, protects our communities, and rewards those working on the frontlines of this pandemic. We also pray that He accepts our fasts, acts of worship and prayers during this blessed month, and grant success over this pandemic.

Respectfully,

The National Muslim COVID-19 Taskforce

Organizations:

American Muslim Community Foundation (AMCF)	Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA)
American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)	Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)
Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA)	Mercy Without Limits
CELEBRATEMERCY	Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)	Muslim Caucus Education Collective
Darul Qasim	North American Imam's Federation (NAIF)
Engage	Penny Appeal USA
Fiqh Council of North America (FCNA)	SEEMA
Imamia Medics International	Stanford Muslim Mental Health Lab
Initiative on Islam & Medicine (II&M)	SWISS
Institute for Muslim Mental Health	The Mosque Cares, Ministry of Imam W. Deen Mohammed
Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA)	United Mission For Relief and Development (UMR)
Islamic Networks Group (ING)	

