



OBSERVING RAMADAN SAFELY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

2021 GUIDELINES

**RAMADAN WORKING GROUP
CANADIAN MUSLIM COVID-19 TASK FORCE**

#SafeRamadan



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful)

The objective of the *Observing Ramadan Safely During the COVID-19 Pandemic 2021 Ramadan Guidelines* is to take a faith and evidence-based approach to ensuring that Muslims across Canada are able to observe a Ramadan that is spiritually uplifting, while still prioritizing the health and safety of our communities. This document was created after consultation with Imams, mosque administrators, community members and medical and public health professionals who had the opportunity to provide meaningful feedback iteratively.

Public health recommendations and guidance are subject to rapidly change over the course of the month of Ramadan. As such, community members and mosques are advised always to stay abreast of the latest developments from public health and governments, to use the guiding principles within this document, and to adapt to the evolving situation in their region and their local context.

Supporting Organizations

Canadian Council of Imams

Muslim Medical Association of Canada

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We appreciate the efforts of the many members of the Canadian Muslim COVID-19 Taskforce, the Canadian Council of Imams, and the Muslim Medical Association of Canada to develop this guideline. A draft version was disseminated to public health departments across the country and we appreciated the opportunity to incorporate feedback received from the following departments:

Hamilton Public Health

Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health

Niagara Public Health

Ottawa Public Health

Peel Public Health

Toronto Public Health

Windsor-Essex Public Health

Disclosures

There are no relevant personal or organizational disclosures. References to organizations, companies, or entities within this guideline are purely suggestive in nature and for the purpose of providing examples. The Canadian Muslim COVID-19 Task Force, the Canadian Council of Imams and the Muslim Medical Association of Canada are not being provided with any compensation whatsoever to develop these guidelines and do not have any relationships that would constitute a conflict of interest.

RAMADAN GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

This year's Ramadan will again be unique and different from last year. We continue to live amidst a pandemic with a high risk of infection and illness, yet we also have opportunities to be vaccinated to protect ourselves and our communities. We must be vigilant in ensuring that we keep up the precautions that we've been maintaining over this long year, as a promising future is near. Obeying the law is as much a civic duty as a religious obligation in Islam.

The following recommendations aim to ensure that we can observe the blessed month of Ramadan in a safe and spiritually meaningful way. These guidelines were informed by government policy, evidence-based medical and public health principles and Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence), given the extenuating circumstances we currently find ourselves in. May Allah accept our supplications and may the blessings of Ramadan permeate our hearts, our homes, and our communities. Ameen.

Caring for Ourselves and Our Family

- The same key principles that we have already been following throughout this pandemic remain highly relevant and effective during Ramadan as well, including:
 - Minimizing the size of **group gatherings** to allowable limits and avoiding unnecessary, high-risk exposures
 - Practising **physical distancing** (2 metres)
 - **Wearing a mask effectively** in public settings (Appendix A)
 - **Washing our hands** regularly and effectively
 - Downloading, installing and running the official [Canada COVID-19 Alert app](#) so that we are notified and can notify others anonymously, when exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19, respectively.
- Regardless of being partially or fully vaccinated, we must continue to practice public health measures in interactions with members from outside of our household and in public settings.
- The past year has been tough for everyone. It is important to seek help from others when we are feeling overwhelmed. Our task force website contains many Canadian Muslim and other [financial](#), [food](#) and [mental health](#) support links that can be accessed.

Getting Tested for COVID-19 During Ramadan

- Getting a COVID-19 test while fasting will not break our fast.
- If we have been exposed to or have any [symptoms of COVID-19](#), we should get tested as soon as possible.

If We Develop COVID-19 or Illness During Ramadan

- If we are sick or have symptoms, we should stay at home and isolate from everyone else in the house. We should connect with our local public health department and healthcare provider (e.g. doctor or nurse) for guidance on how best to take care of ourselves.
- If the symptoms are severe or we cannot manage at home, we should not hesitate in going to the emergency department at our local hospital.
- As with any illness, it is not mandatory to fast if we are ill, and fasting in some scenarios may potentially pose a risk to our health. We can make up our fast afterwards when we are better, or can pay the appropriate amount of *fidyah* (feeding one needy person per day) if we have a chronic illness or cannot fast indefinitely.
- If we have questions regarding whether it is safe for us to fast or if we qualify for an exemption, we should reach out to our healthcare provider and local Imam for guidance.
- If we have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have recently attended a mosque, we should inform the mosque and our local public health department. If we have either the [Canadian COVID-19 Alert App](#) or the [COVID-19 reporting form](#) downloaded, we should anonymously indicate our COVID-19 status there as well.

Vaccination During Ramadan

- This year, the COVID-19 vaccine will likely be available to many individuals during the month of Ramadan. Everyone is recommended to get vaccinated as soon as they are eligible, and without delay.
- All licenced vaccines are effective at reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalizations, and death from COVID-19.
- The [Pfizer-BioNTech](#), [Moderna](#), [AstraZeneca-Oxford](#), and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccines are Halal and permissible for Muslims to take. A detailed statement regarding the Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine will be released in the coming weeks *InshAllah*.
- Taking the COVID-19 vaccine does not break our fast.
- It is not necessary to eat before or right after vaccination. Staying hydrated and eating nourishing *suhoors* will help ensure that we are staying well for activities during Ramadan, including vaccination.
- The vast majority will be able to receive the vaccine and have minimal or no side effects, whether fasting or not. If we feel our condition will worsen if we keep our fast, then it is permissible to break it.
- All current public health measures related to gatherings, masking and physical distancing in all public spaces must still be followed.

Caring for Our Communities

“O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you - as it was for those before you - so perhaps you will become mindful of Allah.” [Quran, 2:183]

- If our local mosque is unable to accommodate in-person prayer, we should pray at home and not start private prayer gatherings with those outside of our household.
- While praying in the mosque may be less available, there are many other spiritually enlightening opportunities in Ramadan that we can avail:
 - Generosity and volunteering
 - [Volunteer Canada](#) collects links for various local volunteer opportunities that are safe during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Reach out to your local mosque to ask if they need any assistance
 - Make monetary or food donations to [local food banks](#) and mosques
 - Make monetary donations if feasible to local mosques, charities and community organizations
 - *“Wealth will not be decreased by giving to charity. And a forgiving slave must be rewarded by Allah with authority” [Sahih Muslim].*
- We may continue worshipping at home through increased recitation of the Quran, connecting with our family and learning more about Islam.
 - Set aside time during the day for at least 30 minutes to focus on our *deen*.
 - Remember to support and make *dua* for the vulnerable and those less fortunate.
- We should reach out (virtually or safely in person if permitted) and connect with our neighbours, families, and friends. Many in our communities need additional support if they are recovering from COVID-19, have to stay home from work to isolate, or are struggling with social isolation.

Visiting the Mosque During Ramadan

- If our local mosque is open to the public, it is permissible to attend. Similarly, if our local mosque is closed to the public due to high rates of COVID-19 in the region, we are [afforded a concession](#) to continue praying at home, similar to earlier in the pandemic.
- **We should follow all the rules of our mosque with regard to screening, contact tracing, registration for prayers, masking, physical distancing, and the maximum size of congregation.**
 - *“Do not cause harm or return harm.” [Ibn Majah]*
- Mosques will be limited by whether or not they are open to the public, and by the maximum number of worshippers who may pray in-person. Let's be respectful and patient with our mosque administrators and Imams as they do their best to serve the spiritual needs of our communities.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jumu'ah prayer [remains non-obligatory](#).

- We should not attend multiple mosques during the month of Ramadan. For example, **do not** attend one mosque for *Jumu'ah* and another mosque for *Taraweeh*.
- We should not travel between different regions to attend alternative mosques. This poses additional risks to mosque staff and other communities.
- We should not carpool to the mosque with members of other households.
- [IslamicFinder](#) and [The Masjid App](#) are useful ways to find active mosques near you.

***Iftaar* Gatherings in the Community**

- *Iftaar* gatherings serve a purpose in creating unity and community during Ramadan.
- If gatherings with others outside of your household are not permitted within your region as per the most updated public health guidelines, we should not host or attend *Iftaar* gatherings.
- If gatherings are permitted, we should stay within permitted regional allowances and recommendations (including gathering size limits, physical distancing and masking requirements).
- If we or anyone in close contact with us is sick with symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed, we should not attend any gatherings, get tested as soon as possible, isolate, and seek medical attention as necessary.

***Taraweeh* Prayers at Home**

- Praying *Taraweeh* in the mosque and at home are both from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (PBUH).
- *Taraweeh* prayers may be prayed individually and do not have to be performed in *Jama'ah* (congregation). This is a recommended option for unvaccinated and high-risk (elderly, chronic medical conditions, or for those with weak immune systems) groups, and those under quarantine or isolation.
- Following the prayer virtually is not permitted by the four schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence.

***'Itikaf* (Last 10 Days Isolation in the Mosque)**

- We strongly do not recommend *'Itikaf* in the mosque this year.

RAMADAN GUIDANCE FOR MOSQUES

These recommendations aim to make this Ramadan a spiritual month for all while observing the best available public health precautions and standards. Guidance for mosques have been [previously developed](#) for the COVID-19 pandemic. This document shares additional best practices compiled after consultations with mosque leaders, administrators, Muslim health experts and public health departments.

Each mosque administration should carefully consider the risk of opening with limitations to enable some Ramadan services, versus remaining closed to ensure the maximum safety of the congregation. **In particular, if there is a relatively high amount of infection circulating in the community, the mitigation recommendations listed here may not be sufficient - It is recommended that mosques in these “hotspot” communities do not open their doors to the public and continue to maintain the rights of the mosque, as done so previously.**

Public health officials identify the following risk factors as driving the transmission of COVID-19: close contact, closed spaces, ineffective mask-wearing, and crowded places. As mosques may feature several of these risk factors several times a day during the busy month of Ramadan, these guidelines have been developed to help mitigate some of these risks. We wish to ensure that our mosques are able to remain open throughout the entire month for congregants to be able to pray and worship safely. Please also consider proactively reaching out to your local public health authority, as it may be willing and able to perform an inspection and give advice tailored to your mosque's needs.

Rules for Mosque Congregants

- All congregants must be [completely symptom-free](#), including mild symptoms. All congregants that have had recent close contact with a person confirmed to be positive for COVID-19 must follow advice from their local public health authority before entering the mosque.
- **No registered individuals attending the mosque should be turned away** unless the mosque has reached capacity, they are exhibiting signs and symptoms of illness, or have otherwise been screened out.
 - It is recommended that those under 10 years old and those unvaccinated or partially vaccinated over 65 years old should pray at home.
 - Persons over the age of 65 years that are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, or that are at high risk may still attend the mosque if they choose to do so; effective masking with the addition of a face shield would provide additional protection for these persons.
 - Primary caregivers to unvaccinated elderly, the immunocompromised, or to those of vulnerable health are also recommended to pray at home.

- All individuals, including Imams, congregants, staff and volunteers, within the mosque are required to wear a mask at all times, including while speaking.
 - Individuals unable to or otherwise exempt from wearing a mask effectively will not be able to attend the mosque and have already been afforded religious exemptions.
- Congregants for prayer services should bring their own prayer mat and make *wudu* (purification) at home.
- Ask attendees to bring bags, or provide bags for attendees to keep their shoes with them while praying. This is to prevent crowding at the shoe rack before and after prayer.
- Being vaccinated for COVID-19 **does not** replace safety precautions, including wearing a mask and physical distancing.

Management of Congregants

- Many regions require mosques, as part of their [guidance for houses of worship](#), to develop and implement a COVID-19 safety plan that details the safety measures you are taking.
- Reasonable effort should be taken to inform all potential congregants of the mosque of implemented guidelines with as much advance notice as possible.
- Mosques should adhere to regional capacity limits for congregants for houses of worship.

Registration

- Significant efforts should be made to ensure that as many unique people as possible have the opportunity to attend the mosque during Ramadan in an equitable manner regardless of age or gender.
- Mosques are encouraged to set up a registration process in advance of Ramadan to cohort groups of congregants together and ensure everyone has a fair chance to attend daily prayers, *Jumu'ah*, *Taraweeh* and/or *Tahajjud*.
 - Advance registration offers significant logistical benefits to mosques and community members. This can be facilitated in person at daily prayers or *Jumu'ah*, via telephone or online registration. Offering multiple registration channels ensures congregants that may not have access or ability to use one registration method are not disadvantaged.
 - In-person registration is discouraged but if needed, should be administered by a single volunteer to limit the sharing of pens and papers.
 - The number of registrants can be divided into groups based on the allowed capacity.
 - For example, if the allowed limited capacity of the building is 100 congregants and there are 500 registrants for *Taraweeh*, there will be 5 groups of registrants. Each group can be assigned up to 6 days in the month to attend *Taraweeh*.

Screening

- All congregants, volunteers, and staff should be screened before entering the mosque for any symptoms, interprovincial or international travel, or recent unprotected close contact with a COVID-19-confirmed person in the past 14 days. Place floor markings 2 metres apart at entrances and exits to guarantee physical distancing in line ups.
 - Temperature scanners may be unreliable, can be deceived, may provide false reassurance or cause screening delays and therefore are not recommended.
 - Screening forms and posters available from your province or regional public health department can be helpful in guiding screening for all symptoms. Links are provided for each province's resources in Appendix C.
- Proof of vaccination should **not** be a requirement for congregants, however mosques and Imams should encourage congregants to get vaccinated at the earliest available opportunity.
- Staff and volunteers to help direct attendees in parking lots can minimize the risks of people congregating in a non-physically distanced manner.

Contact Tracing

- A secure and effective paper or digital contact tracing system should be in place, where the date, time, name and contact details (telephone number and email address) of congregants, volunteers, and staff are recorded or confirmed as they enter the mosque.
 - Consider the use of existing contact tracing applications like [GuestLog](#) for efficiency.
 - Information should be only provided to public health officials if needed, and stored for at least 30 days prior to being securely destroyed.
 - If COVID-19 cases are reported, public health will guide mosques in contact tracing and advise participants to self-quarantine and consider testing if necessary.

Additional Risk Mitigation Strategies

- Traffic flow of persons should proceed in one direction only upon entry and exit to prevent congestion. Signage should be clear in indicating entry and exit points.
- All individuals should maintain 2 metres of physical distancing at all times, including in line-ups inside and outside the mosque. Markers should be placed where possible for congregants to identify where to sit or stand during prayer. While household members may pray beside each other, this can be challenging to verify and accommodate logistically with pre-marked prayer spots. Staff and volunteers should monitor for lapses in physical distancing and gently remind attendees to comply with this public health requirement.
- Providing hand sanitizer stations will help improve hand hygiene practices given washrooms will be restricted to emergency use only.
- Congregants should be recommended to use the washroom and perform *wudu* (ablution) prior to arriving at the mosque.

- There should be no eating or drinking inside the mosque to minimize mask removal. Staff and others should quickly break their fast if needed outside the mosque in a physically-distanced manner.
- Signage should be prominent and serve to remind attendees to maintain physical distance, avoid physical contact with others, maintain proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Consider also having these signs in additional languages predominant amongst attendees.

Security

- Security should be managed by each respective mosque as needed and based on their own prior experiences. Disruptive individuals should be managed with verbal de-escalation, security, and local law enforcement as necessary. The Imam will be a helpful resource in asking congregants to abide with mask-wearing and physical distancing, with reminders at the podium and regular updates at congregations leading up to Ramadan.

First Aid and Medical Emergencies

- Mosques should have a team of people or at least one staff member who is trained in first aid to handle people who may face physical fatigue or exhaustion and have a separate room where people can be taken to recover, while observing all safety measures.
- All attendees feeling unwell should be screened for COVID-19 and managed accordingly.
- Mosques should have plans in place on how to safely and effectively deal with medical emergencies.

Possible or Confirmed Cases of COVID-19

- If a COVID-19 positive individual was at the mosque, the mosque should temporarily close and immediately contact their local public health authority. They may advise next steps such as asking individuals present within a designated time period (e.g. same prayer) to be notified to monitor their symptoms, quarantine and/or get tested.
- If there is more than one case and transmission within the mosque is suspected, an outbreak may be called by the local public health authority. Registration logs should be provided to public health upon request so that congregants may be contacted.
- The CMCTF strongly recommends a reassessment and review of all safety processes with all staff and volunteers every week during Ramadan, as well as whenever a COVID-19 positive case is identified.
- Mosques should follow their safety plan to manage potential cases of COVID-19 and contact their local public health authority for support as needed.
- After the mosque has undergone thorough regular cleaning and a period of outside air ventilation, the mosque should be able to reopen safely.

Maintaining a Clean Space

- A proper sanitization protocol should be in place and adhered to at each mosque, with all the necessary tasks to be performed after each service in accordance with regional public health recommendations for buildings and/or houses of worship.
- Maximize ventilation of the mosque with:
 - Open windows and doors as much as possible as weather and safety permits before, during, and after prayers.
 - Regularly maintain or upgrade high efficiency ventilation air filters and systems with the assistance of an HVAC professional
 - Switch HVAC fan setting from 'AUTO' to 'ON'
 - Avoid centrally-located overhead fans which may re-circulate contaminated air. Use strategically located window fans that will help exhaust indoor air outdoors if needed.
 - Portable HEPA fan/filter systems
 - See Appendix C for more details.
- [Health Canada-approved disinfectants](#) should be used to clean carpets, doors, knobs, handles, tables, chairs and any other common-use surfaces before, in-between and after each prayer.
- Vacuum carpets twice-weekly.
 - Carpet disinfection should take place weekly during Ramadan. Given that this can take significant time, a suggested cleaning time may be Mondays after Fajr as this is a longer break between mosque services, is on a weekday and immediately follows a busy weekend.
- Washrooms should be available for emergency use only and should be sanitized regularly and appropriately after use. Adequate ventilation within the washrooms, including functional exhaust fans, is required if washrooms are open.
 - In multi-user washrooms, a maximum of 1 person should be allowed at a time.
- *Wudu* facilities should remain closed.
 - Performing *wudu* would require removal of a mask and increases the risk of viruses spreading in the air.
 - If congregants need to re-perform their *wudu*, the washrooms should be adequate and used only on an as-needed, emergency basis.
- Congregants should bring their own Quran and *tasbeeh* (prayer beads) and these should not be shared.
- Microphones should be used to project voice if needed. There should be no sharing of the microphone and it should be disinfected between different users.

Service Recommendations

- Mosque management must familiarize themselves with and follow the most recent and updated restrictions within their region regarding permission to hold indoor or outdoor prayers and gathering size/capacity limits.
- It is recommended to prioritize the daily *Fardh* (mandatory) prayers and *Jumu'ah* and then assess the mosque's capacity to facilitate *Taraweeh* and *Tahajjud* services according to resource capacity.
- If allowed, outdoor prayers are preferred over indoors, to allow for increased ventilation as weather, property rights, fire regulations and regional public health guidance permits.

The 5 Daily Prayers

"Whoever goes to the mosque in the morning and evening, Allah prepares a place for him in Paradise for every morning and evening." [Bukhari]

- Daily prayers should be held with adherence to regional limits on attendee capacity.
- The commonly touched surfaces of the mosque should be fully sanitized after each prayer and the mosque should close for an appropriate time to ensure proper cleaning occurs.
- If *Maghrib* (sunset) prayers are held, congregants should be advised to break their fast in their cars and then enter the mosque with their masks on.
- Mosques that will hold *Maghrib* prayers may consider delaying the prayer by a few minutes, to allow congregants to break their fast in their car and then enter the mosque after screening.
- *Fardh* prayers at the mosque are prioritized and *Sunnah*/*Nafl* prayers should be prayed at home in regions with high rates of COVID-19 and with increased restrictions in place.

Jumu'ah (Friday Prayers)

- *Jumu'ah* prayers should be held as possible. During the COVID-19 pandemic, [this remains non-obligatory](#). However, those who are not in high risk groups should make an effort to attend if their local mosque is open to the public.
- If there are multiple prayers, there should be sufficient time between prayers to allow for proper sanitization and for congregants to enter and exit without crowding. In consultation, mosques have reported needing at least 30 minutes between the last person leaving from one gathering and the first person attending the next gathering to be able to accomplish this.

Taraweeh (Additional Night Prayer)

- All guidelines around curfews, capacity, safety, and sanitization requirements must continue to be observed.
- If there is a curfew in place, *Taraweeh* prayer timings may be adjusted as possible to be within curfew limits and should be over with sufficient time for congregants to return home.

- In hotspot regions where there is significantly higher concern for COVID-19 transmission, *Taraweeh* prayers are not recommended, and multiple *Isha* prayers can be considered with the same precautions as multiple *Jumu'ah* prayers.
- Due to the exceptional circumstances, Imams shortening the *Taraweeh* and *Dua-Al Qunoot* to 1 hour or less, from the start of *Isha* to the end of *Witr* will minimize the risk of transmission and be more comfortable for congregants that are wearing a mask for this period of time.
- Congregants should be guided to step outside the mosque to drink water or consume food, to avoid removal of masks inside the mosque.
- Cohorting and allowing more congregants the opportunity to participate over different dates is recommended. Open registration and multiple *Taraweeh* prayers is not recommended.

Short Reminders Between *Taraweeh*

- During this Ramadan, it is recommended to do this virtually or at other times during the day in order to keep the visit to the mosque as short as possible for congregants.

Tahajjud/Qiyam-ul Layl (Late Night Prayer)

"Our Lord Almighty descends to the lowest heaven in the last third of every night, saying: Who is calling upon Me that I may answer him? Who is asking from Me that I may give him? Who is seeking My forgiveness that I may forgive him?" [Bukhari]

- The *Tahajjud* prayers are an important part of the blessed month. Although this prayer can be prayed at home, mosques can elect to establish this prayer as needed and in the last 10 days, while observing the safety measures set out above.

Iftaar (Breaking of Fast at Dinner)

"Whoever helps break the fast of someone fasting will receive the same reward as him (fasting person) without decreasing the reward of the one who fasted." [Tirmidhi]

- In order of preference, our recommendations for *Iftaar* gatherings at the mosque are as follows:
 1. *Iftaar* gatherings should not occur within the mosque building.
 - a. Request congregants, volunteers, and staff to break their fast at home or in their vehicles.
 2. Drive-thru *Iftaars*
 - a. Mosques may consider hosting 'Drive-thru *Iftaars*' where volunteers distribute individually-packaged food to cars for consumption within one's vehicle or at home.
 - b. Volunteers and attendees in cars should be asked to mask and follow physical distancing measures. Hand sanitizer should be readily available.
 - c. Providing food for a fasting person is a tremendous *Sunnah* and a wonderful demonstration of love amongst Muslims.

- d. Community members that sponsor *Iftaar* dinners can be encouraged to contribute food or money for these Drive-thru *Iftaars* or food banks as an alternative. This may also be a good opportunity to support local restaurants and businesses.
 - e. Provided dinners should aim to use environmentally-friendly packaging and care should be taken to ensure clean up immediately after.
3. Outdoor *Iftaars* that are physically distanced.
- a. Physically-distanced outdoor *Iftaars* may be considered with individual pre-packed food boxes only if regional public health guidance allows outdoor dining.
 - b. Safety precautions must still be followed with masks only off during immediate eating.
 - c. Groups should be from the same household, and should be 2 metres from other groups.
 - d. Fire and property regulations must be followed with regard to eating locations.
 - e. Mosques will have final discretion on the permissibility of this on their premises. Mosques should be proactive in understanding how their congregants may approach outdoor *Iftaars* in proximity to the mosque.

‘Itikaf (Last 10 Days Isolation in the Mosque)

- We strongly do not recommend ‘*Itikaf* in the mosque this year.

Classes and Additional Events

- It is not recommended to have additional or extracurricular in-person indoor classes or events during Ramadan, with the goal of prioritizing time, space and gatherings for prayer.
- Consider [virtual programs](#) such as Zoom sessions, podcasts, or safe outdoor events including for youth as weather permits and regional public health guidance allows.

APPENDIX A – RATIONALE & CONSIDERATIONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective Masking

An [effective mask](#) covers your nose, mouth, and chin without any leaks or gaps. If your mask does not do this, it will be less effective. Similarly, masks with valves are strongly discouraged.

- Wear a mask whenever you are in public or interacting with others outside of your household. Do not pull down your mask while speaking with someone, and instead try speaking louder and slower to better convey your message.
- Wearing a face shield provides additional protection, especially for vulnerable individuals, but is not an equivalent alternative to wearing a mask. If you choose to wear a face shield, you should still wear a mask underneath.
- Wearing a [well-fitting](#) mask with 3 layers (2 fabric layers + filter) is encouraged to minimize transmission.
- ASTM level 2 or 3 masks or better are not required but provide additional protection at a cost. They can be purchased by community members or mosques from this [list of Canadian suppliers](#) collated by Masks4Canada.
- Individuals unable to or exempt from wearing a mask will not be able to attend the mosque.

Gatherings

Reducing community spread of COVID-19 is critical not just within the mosque, but also in all our community interactions as well. All Canadians have a role to play in curbing the spread of COVID-19 within our communities. If we are complacent and there are outbreaks of COVID-19 due to community gatherings, this may result in changes to the region's COVID-19 framework zone or phase, perpetuate negative perceptions of Muslims, and subsequently may jeopardize the ability of our mosques to accommodate as many persons as possible during Ramadan.

Vaccination During Ramadan

The COVID-19 vaccine roll-out may allow the highest risk members of our society to be protected and therefore able to safely attend the mosque if fully vaccinated. Before Ramadan, it is strongly recommended to encourage as many of your congregation, especially seniors, to get vaccinated. Faith leaders can mention that this is now a mandatory requirement for Hajj as announced by the Ministry in Saudi Arabia. However, vaccination should not be used as a barrier for entry as congregants may not have access to vaccines or may have underlying medical conditions that prevent vaccination.

Management of Congregants

Each mosque is different in terms of geographic location, local regulations, congregation demographic, building capacity, rooms and ventilation, staffing, and resources. These differences will inform many decisions around attendee management, including permissible capacity and the need for security.

Nonetheless, it is critical to maintain maximum COVID-19 safety measures, as the 3rd wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada is more dangerous than prior waves. If appropriate precautionary measures for COVID-19 are not taken, this could cause an upsurge in cases during the middle of Ramadan, impacting both the health of our community and access to mosques and prayer spaces. This would be especially unfortunate if it impacted the blessed last 10 days of Ramadan. As a community, we should all aim to ensure that full precautions are taken including hand hygiene, physical distancing and masking in all our daily interactions.

Maintaining a Clean Space

Many of these clean space measures already exist at most mosques as they have been implemented over the past year. It will be important to uphold measures wherever they exist and seek to continue adherence and improvement wherever necessary.

Service Recommendations

The goal in managing congregants, ensuring clean spaces, and controlling certain activities during Ramadan is to mitigate risk, as outbreaks not only pose a risk to health and life, but can lead to closures and affect the opportunity for others to pray at the mosque.

Regional curfews, fire and property regulations for both indoor and outdoor prayers must be adhered to by law by both congregants and mosques.

There are strong evidence-based concerns regarding the 3rd wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, based on predictive modelling for Canada and the experiences of other countries with the rising proportion of variants of concern. These variants are not just highly transmissible but can cause more severe illness. Ramadan this year unfortunately coincides with the 3rd wave and it will be imperative to maintain good adherence to regional and governmental guidelines to protect our community and to ensure a smooth and uninterrupted observance of Ramadan.

Sunnah Prayers

Sunnah and *Nafl* prayers should be prayed at home in regions with high rates of COVID-19, to make it quicker for congregants to enter and leave the mosque as a group, to facilitate timely cleaning and minimize time spent in the same environment. This may be more flexible in regions with lower prevalence and decreased restrictions.

Iftaar

Iftaar dinners provide an opportunity for Muslims to connect as a community during Ramadan and an opportunity to connect with faith. However, the risk of an infection spreading and developing

COVID-19 is very high with indoor gatherings where members not from the same household remove their masks to eat while engaging in conversation and socializing.

These guidelines make preferential recommendations for *Iftaars* prioritizing safety, while acknowledging the importance of community. These preferences occur in order to discourage indoor dinner gatherings while maximizing physical distancing measures. Extra consideration is made to minimize potential contact and exposure with individually packaged foods. Outdoor physically-distanced *Iftar* dinners should only occur in regions where local public health authorities have loosened restrictions and allowed outdoor dining gatherings. Fire and property regulations must be followed with regard to eating locations.

Mosques have final discretion on their capacity to host Drive-thru *Iftaars* and outdoor physically-distanced *Iftar* dinners on mosque property, within regional limits. Mosques should be proactive in understanding how their congregants may approach outdoor *Iftaars* in proximity to the mosque.

Taraweeh

All Muslim scholars agree that *Taraweeh* prayer is not *Fardh*. Some say that it is *Nafl* or voluntary while some say that it is *Sunnah*, even an emphasized *Sunnah*. It is reported in *Bukhari* that the Prophet (PBUH) prayed two or three nights with the community, but stopped doing so, so that it would not be considered a *Fardh*. He then told the people to pray in their homes. In line with our recommendation to pray *Sunnah* prayers at home, for mosques in regions where there is significant concern about the spread of the virus, multiple *Isha* prayers may be held at the mosque and community members should pray *Taraweeh* at home with their families. Those who pray *Taraweeh* at home this year, while COVID-19 rates are high, should not feel that they are neglecting something essential in our religion. On the contrary, they will be following the explicit instruction of the Prophet (PBUH).

'Itikaf

'Itikaf is *Sunnah* and is not recommended due to limitations in mosque infrastructure. As Muslims from different households would be living in the same space, taking off their masks and sharing the same air and bathrooms, individual risk mitigation strategies cannot be guaranteed despite having dividers or separate rooms for those performing *'Itikaf*. It is also important to note that during *'Itikaf*, additional congregants would still be entering the mosque for various services like daily prayers or *Taraweeh* and would therefore be exposed to the *'Itikaf* members.

APPENDIX B – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Does having a COVID-19 test break my fast?

No, taking a COVID-19 test while fasting does not break the fast.

2. If I feel symptoms of COVID-19, do I have to break my fast?

Symptoms of COVID-19 can vary. If fasting will worsen your illness, delay your recovery, or if you need to take medications urgently, an exemption to the fast can be made. Missed fasts must be made up later. Consult your doctor if you are unsure whether fasting is safe for you, or your Imam if you are unsure about exemptions to the fast. Get tested and/or seek medical attention as appropriate.

3. Does getting a COVID-19 vaccine break my fast?

No, taking the vaccine while fasting does not break the fast.

4. If I feel symptoms from vaccination, do I have to break my fast?

Most people will have minimal or no symptoms from vaccination and should not need to break their fast. If you feel your condition will worsen if you keep your fast, then it is permissible to break it.

5. Should I delay my vaccine appointment until after *Iftaar* or Ramadan?

There is no medical or religious reason to delay a vaccine appointment while fasting.

6. Can we have *Iftaar* with our extended family?

Depending on your region, community gatherings with those who do not live with you may not be allowed. Please follow regional public health guidance on what is permissible for social gatherings.

7. If we, or members of other households, are partially or fully vaccinated, can we meet for *Iftaar* or other gatherings?

Regardless of being partially or fully vaccinated, we must continue to practice public health measures in all our interactions with those outside our household and in public settings for the foreseeable future. This includes physical distancing, wearing a mask, hand hygiene and following local public health guidance on gathering limits.

APPENDIX C - VENTILATION GUIDELINES FOR MOSQUES

Windows and Doors

- Keep windows open during and between prayers as much as possible, as weather permits. This may also help with keeping worshippers comfortable while praying during ambient weather.

Maintenance of Existing Air Filtration

- Avoid central fans to prevent circulation of viruses and bacteria. Peripheral or window fans are preferred. If central fans are needed for temperature control, use the lowest speed setting and point them upwards and away from people.
- Change ventilation air filters before Ramadan and perform any maintenance or upgrades in advance.
- A good measure of your mosque's ventilation system is by assessing your mosque's Indoor Air Quality (IAQ). CO2 levels are a marker of indoor air quality; in indoor environments, they should ideally be below 700 ppm while the mosque is empty and when at maximal capacity over a 1 hour period of monitoring.
 - Maximum tolerated CO2 levels is 1000 ppm, above which effects such as cognitive impairment, discomfort, and increased respiratory symptoms may be experienced.
 - If your mosque's CO2 levels are outside this tolerable level, then ventilation needs to be optimized.
- ASHRAE recommends MERV 13 or better air filters and HVAC systems to be used.
- Increase the number of air exchanges to at least 2 or more exchanges per hour.
- Increase the operation of ventilation systems up to 24/7 to keep air moving through the filtration system. I.e. set HVAC fan set to ON instead of Auto.

New Investments

- Consider investing in portable air purifiers with HEPA and UV filters.
- Investing in better air filtration systems is an additional measure that can reduce the risk of spread of not just viruses, but other germs and air particles that cause indoor air pollution. They are not a substitute for and do not obviate the need for continuing other effective and mandated public health measures such as wearing masks, physical distancing, etc.
- Consider enlisting the help of a civil, mechanical, or HVAC engineer from your congregation.
- Consider fundraising for these investments, or check for local or provincial funding programs.

References

[PHO - Use of Portable Air Cleaners and Transmission of COVID-19](#)
[Coronavirus Prevention with Air Filters: Understanding MERV and HEPA](#)
[Consultation: Proposed Residential Indoor Air Quality Guidelines for Carbon Dioxide](#)

[Improve Your IAQ and Monitor CO2 | Onset Data Loggers](#)

[Indoor Environmental Quality in Air-conditioned Mosque Buildings in Kuwait](#)

[Numerical Investigations of Indoor Air Quality inside Al-Haram Mosque in Makkah](#)

[Air Cleaners For Particulate Contaminants](#)