



Upcoming Islamic Holidays and Religious Accommodations

The Washington state chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-WA) is a branch of the nation’s largest Muslim civil liberties organization. We are writing to remind you that three major Islamic holidays are approaching this year. We encourage you to note the following religious observances and holidays in your planning process and to offer appropriate religious accommodations to employees, students, and others whom you work with:

Table with 2 columns: Holiday Name and Dates. Rows include Ramadan (March 22 – April 20 +/- one day), Eid Al-Fitr (April 21–24 (Sundown to Sundown) +/- one day), and Eid Al-Adha (June 29–July 3 (Sundown to Sundown) +/- one day).

*Note: the date may vary by one day depending on the individual’s religious school of thought.

Ramadan: In 2023, Ramadan will begin on March 22 (+/- one day) and last 29 to 30 days. There are different ways to observe or practice one’s faith during this holy month. Predominantly, Muslims will fast from eating and drinking (yes, even water) starting before sunrise until sunset. Many Muslims also increase their worship and study of the Quran during Ramadan, often attending late night prayers that begin an hour-and-a-half after sunset and last for two hours. Due to late nights and disrupted sleep, Muslims are often more tired than normal during this holy month whether they are fasting or not.

More Background: Ramadan is considered a holy month because it is the time that the holy book, the Quran, was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad. Muslims often use the month for reflection and self-improvement in addition to religious study and additional prayers. Charity and feeding those in need of food are also priorities during the holiday.

Eid days (Festival days): Eid Al-Fitr signifies the end of the month of Ramadan, a period of religious observance essential to the Islamic faith, and Eid Al-Adha signifies the end of Hajj, Islam’s annual holy pilgrimage to Mecca. Both days are commemorated by Muslims worldwide through prayer and celebration per their unique faith traditions. Eid Al-Fitr is 3 days long and Eid Al-Adha is 4 days long, however, most Muslims only require accommodations for the first day of either Eid to attend mandatory congregational prayer and the highly anticipated family and community celebrations held on the first day of either Eid.

Recommended Employer Accommodations: After consulting with local Muslims and reviewing federal and state rulings concerning religious accommodation such as RCW 49.60 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, we urge you to take the following into consideration in your upcoming planning:

- Acknowledge the Holiday: Before Ramadan, send a message to your employees about the holiday. During Ramadan, send greetings! A common greeting is "Ramadan Kareem" or "Ramadan Mubarak," which is an Arabic greeting meaning, "May you have a blessed Ramadan." Also, a simple "Happy holiday to those celebrating Ramadan/Eid!" works well. Let your staff know that you recognize the significance of this time and, possibly, that you are willing to make accommodations for them if they may need it.



- *Flexible Schedules, if Possible:* For those observing, prayers and meals after sunset and before dawn can create long days for weeks in a row. If it's possible within your organization, create flexibility within scheduling during the month of Ramadan. If your employees work in the evening, allow Muslim employees to a break during the sunset hour to pray and break the fast. If you work in an office setting, allowing people to modify their hours to when they feel most productive (for some earlier in the morning or some later in the morning) is always appreciated. Remind employees of your paid time off policies so they may take days off to spend time with family, rest on difficult days or take off for the Eid holiday.
- *Respect Individuals:* Some Muslims may not fast at all during Ramadan or may fast on some days and not others due to age, religious involvement, or health considerations. It is best practice not to ask whether someone is fasting because there are personal or medical reasons tied to it. Assuming someone is fasting is custom. When planning events during this month, we recommend choosing options that don't involve food/drink or where food/drink are optional. If an employee's quality of work changes during this period, please check in with them and explore options to better accommodate their needs and yours as the employer.
- *Break Room/Space:* Setting up a dedicated break room where Muslim staff can pray or take a break would be a considerate gesture. This recommendation is beneficial to many staff members year around – having a private space for nursing parents, meditation, prayers, or to simple step away is positive for all in work settings. For Muslim staff, one or two daily prayer times will typically occur during work hours, depending on the time of year, and while not everyone is able to make prayers for personal reasons, the gesture is greatly appreciated.
- *Be Understanding:* Just as holidays may be stressful or hectic time for any of us, this is true for the Muslim community as well. Patience, kindness, and understanding can go a very long well towards creating a positive and productive workspace.
- *Remember the Communities/Customers You Serve:* The information found here will likely apply to the people you serve or others that you interact with besides your staff.

More information on religious accommodation in Washington can be found here: <https://www.hum.wa.gov/employment/creed-employment>

If you have any questions or would like further resources, please reach out to Senior Communications and Marketing Strategist Katie Walker at kwalker@cair.com or Deputy Executive Director Amanda Azad at aazad@cair.com.