VU VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM

Ramadan 2026

Guide for Colleagues and Students

This guide is designed to help colleagues and students within the Physics and Astronomy Department at the VU Amsterdam understand and support those observing Ramadan. This document provides an overview of Ramadan, its significance, and practical ways to support Muslim colleagues and students during this holy month.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan takes place in the ninth month of the Lunar Hijri Islamic Calendar. It is one of the pillars of Islam and is known as the act of fasting (Sawm). It is a holy month for Muslims when they abstain primarily from eating and drinking during the daylight hours. It is considered a time to purify the soul, refocus attention on God, and practice self-sacrifice. Ramadan is also when Muslims mark the revelation of the Quran (Islamic holy book) to the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims will see at the start of the month with greetings of 'Ramadan Mubarak' meaning blessed Ramadan.

When does Ramadan take place?

Ramadan will commence on **February 19th** and finish on **March 20th**. These dates are based on the sighting of the new crescent moon. The sighting may be different for Muslims depending on where they are in the world and which country they follow in relation to the crescent moon sighting. The days over which Ramadan takes place change on a yearly basis, going back each year by approximately ten or eleven days, as a result, the length of the daily fast varies depending on where in the world it is observed.

What happens during fasting?

Over the course of the month, Muslims fast from dawn, waking up for a pre-dawn meal, until sunset, when the fast is opened usually with a meal called "Iftar". Fasting has been shown to have demonstrable health benefits, as well as an appreciation of what people have and a greater empathy for people in need. Muslims abstain from eating and drinking during the day and increase activities such as:

- Spending more time on prayers and reflection with the aim of increasing closeness to God.
- Volunteering, giving to charity and acts of goodwill.
- Sharing their Iftar food and experiences with family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and people who will be observing Ramadan on their own.

Do all Muslims fast?

All Muslims are required to fast; however, there are exemptions for young children, the elderly, people traveling, pregnant/nursing women, or during the period of menstruation, and people with illnesses or on medication and whenever fasting may be against health advice.

What happens at the end of Ramadan?

At the end, Muslims gather to mark Eid al-Fitr, with greetings of 'Eid Mubarak'. This is to commemorate the end of Ramadan. Muslims begin festivities with a prayer and then meet with family and friends to exchange gifts, food and well wishes. They may want to take 1 or 2 days off to celebrate, after the end of Ramadan.

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How to support Muslim colleagues during Ramadan

- Allow colleagues to use the time ordinarily taken for lunch, for breaks or prayer times instead. Encourage colleagues to take breaks due to potentially lower energy or concentration levels.
- Where possible, avoid setting early morning meetings or late evening (social) events which may impede on Iftar and prayer times.
- During Ramadan, managers and supervisors may receive more requests for flexible working hours, such as adjusted start and finish times or hybrid working arrangements. Where feasible, temporarily altering working patterns can support Muslim colleagues in maintaining productivity while observing their religious obligations.
- Muslim colleagues may spend more time praying and engaging in charitable activities during Ramadan. If business needs allow, managers should consider accommodating annual leave requests to support these practices.
- Friday is the most important day of the week for Muslims for midday prayers, which may take slightly longer as Muslims will congregate in mosques and prayers are usually followed by a sermon.
- The last ten days of Ramadan hold special significance for Muslims. It is believed the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad on these days. Consider some Muslims may spend nights in worship and prayer during some of these days.

Considerations

- Not all Muslim colleagues and students will necessarily request special arrangements. Speak to your students and colleagues if they are observing Ramadan, to see if they feel fasting may impact on their work/studies and what support they would find helpful.
- When determining deadlines for assessments and coursework, please consider the Eid dates, in which colleagues and students may hold celebrations over one to two days after the end of Ramadan.
- In addition, there will be changes or disruptions to regular sleep patterns as employees and students may wake up before sunrise and sleep later in line with opening and closing fasts and to pray.
- Whilst Muslim colleagues and students may not object to food and drink being consumed in their presence, you may wish to avoid this.
- If you are planning an event or notice any potential clashes and would like some guidance, please contact the DEI council at PRJ-BETA-DEIgroup@groups.vu.nl.

Can a non-Muslim fast?

For Muslims and people of faith, fasting is more than just forgoing food and water and strongly intertwined with their faith. Fasting can help with spiritual rejuvenation, self-control, and spiritual purification. In addition, Muslims avoid food and water during the daylight hours, the act of intimacy, smoking, drinking alcohol and any unhealthy habits. Colleagues may wish to show support by fasting alongside Muslim colleagues. This may not be for the whole month and may be to improve their own physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. Non-Muslims can fast and indeed fasting is also practiced by Christians for example during Lent, as well as in other faiths such as Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.

For colleagues wishing to show support by fasting:

- Be culturally aware. You may want to show support by attending open talks or events around Ramadan to learn about the faith, including for example open invites to Iftar meals to understand the communality around fasting.
- Ask questions, if necessary, but avoid questions or statements such as ‘Do you lose weight?’ ‘Isn’t this hard?’ or ‘How can you go without water or smoking?’ Muslims who observe fasting have fasted since puberty and these are of little concern to them because the focus is on a greater connection with their faith and religious observance.