

Guide to Islamic Religious Practices

For Employers, Institutions, and Service Providers



A PUBLICATION OF

MERCY

Muslim Education & Resources for Community & Youth

www.mercycentre.ca



About MERCY

MERCY – Muslim Education & Resources for Community & Youth is a Canadian organization dedicated to education, community engagement, and youth development. MERCY works to promote understanding, inclusion, and collaboration across diverse communities.

This booklet provides practical guidance on Islamic religious practices in Canadian workplaces and service settings.

Purpose of This Guide

This booklet is designed to:

- Promote understanding of Islamic religious practices
- Support compliance with Canadian human rights laws
- Encourage inclusive workplace and service policies
- Provide practical accommodation guidance

Individual practice may vary. This guide outlines general principles.

Legal Framework in Canada

Freedom of religion is protected under:

- **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**
- **Canadian Human Rights Act**
- Provincial human rights legislation (e.g., **Ontario Human Rights Code**)

Employers, institutions, and service providers have a **duty to accommodate** religious practices unless doing so causes undue hardship related to health, safety, or significant cost.

Core Islamic Practices

1. Daily Prayer

Muslims pray five times daily:

- Early morning
- Midday
- Afternoon
- Sunset
- Night

Key Points:

- Each prayer takes approximately 5–10 minutes.
- Washing (ablution) may require a few additional minutes.
- Prayer can be performed in any clean, quiet space.
- Employees often use existing break times.

Minor flexibility typically satisfies accommodation requirements.

2. Friday Congregational Prayer (Jum'ah)

Friday prayer takes place around midday and may last 45–90 minutes.

Accommodation Options:

- Extended lunch break
- Flexible scheduling
- Making up time before or after shift

Advance notice helps ensure smooth scheduling.

3. Ramadan (Month of Fasting)

Ramadan is observed by fasting from dawn to sunset.

During Ramadan:

- Muslims do not eat or drink during daylight hours.
- Energy levels may vary, especially during longer Canadian summer fasts.

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- Employees continue working and fulfilling responsibilities.

Helpful Practices:

- Flexible break timing
- Consideration for physically demanding tasks when feasible

4. Muslim Holidays (Eid)

Muslims celebrate two major holidays:

- **Eid al-Fitr**
- **Eid al-Adha**

Employees may request one day off for each holiday.

Since the Islamic calendar is lunar, dates shift approximately 10–11 days earlier each year. Advance planning is recommended.

5. Dietary Requirements

Practicing Muslims avoid:

- Pork and pork products
- Alcohol

Many follow halal dietary standards for meat preparation.

Accommodation Examples:

- Offering vegetarian, seafood, or halal options
- Allowing employees to decline handling alcohol or pork products where reasonably possible

6. Pilgrimage (Hajj)

Hajj is a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca for eligible Muslims.

It may require 2–3 weeks of leave. Employees typically use vacation or unpaid leave.

Appearance and Dress

Islam emphasizes modest dress.

Men

- Some wear beards for religious reasons.
- Some wear a kufi (small cap).
- Safety equipment requirements still apply.

Women

- Many wear a hijab (headscarf).
- Clothing is generally loose-fitting and modest.
- Some may wear additional coverings.

Uniform policies should accommodate religious attire unless there is a legitimate safety concern.

Workplace and Service Considerations

Physical Contact

Some Muslims may avoid shaking hands with unrelated members of the opposite sex. This reflects religious modesty, not disrespect.

Eye Contact

Some may limit sustained eye contact with unrelated members of the opposite sex.

Workplace Events

Some Muslims may:

- Decline events centered on other religious observances
- Avoid events where alcohol is served

Respectful non-participation should not result in penalty.

Understanding Undue Hardship

Accommodation is required unless it creates undue hardship. This typically relates to:

- Significant health or safety risks
- Serious financial cost
- Major operational disruption

Most religious accommodations involve minor adjustments and open communication.

Best Practices for Employers & Institutions

- Develop clear religious accommodation policies
- Encourage respectful dialogue
- Train managers and supervisors
- Plan schedules proactively around major holidays
- Foster a culture of inclusion

Conclusion

Understanding Islamic religious practices strengthens diversity, inclusion, and community trust. Most accommodations require minimal adjustment and provide meaningful support to Muslim employees, students, clients, and community members.

For additional guidance or training, contact:

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This booklet is intended for educational purposes and does not constitute legal advice.