

IS COVID-19 PANDEMIC OBSTACLE FOR FASTING IN RAMADAN?

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Analysis

This year Muslims are spending Ramadan very differently in face of the unprecedented situation of COVID-19. Governments have issued guidelines to mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Muslims are advised to have a pre-fast meal (sahur) and the fast-breaking meal (iftar) individually or strictly with their family. Tarawih prayers during Ramadan and Quran recital will be performed strictly at home, Eid prayers at the end of the holy month of Ramadan which are usually performed in open spaces are canceled this year, the two holiest mosques in Makkah and Medina are closed for services, millions of Muslims who usually go to these mosques during Ramadan will stay in their homes to prevent the spread of the virus, we can only pray for a miracle to happen so that the situation normalizes soon.

So, as the novel coronavirus continues its world tour unabated, spreading from country to

country, as people go on to self-isolate in their homes, some Muslims around the world are wondering whether it is advisable to fast during such a pandemic or not. It is a logical question raised by many Muslims worldwide at such a troubled time in human history.

In addition, a large number of countries have kicked off vaccination campaigns in order to combat the pandemic, and they will continue to inoculate their citizens despite Ramadan. But the question does remain among those who observe it, as to whether the shot violates a fast.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and health experts advise people to drink plenty of water and fluids to keep their throat and respiratory tract moist. Does this raise concerns about whether fasting causes dehydration or weakens the immune system?

The WHO confirms that although water is important to moisture the human body, it does



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not protect against the virus, and has not been proven that drinking water and fluids can protect anyone from catching the virus. According to Diyanet (Turkey's Presidency of Spiritual Affairs), the COVID-19 pandemic is not an obstacle for fasting for healthy people. Muslims are therefore required to fast this year, and fasting has nothing to do with the possibility of an increased risk of catching the coronavirus.

A fear of falling ill is not a valid excuse for a Muslim to not fast. There are legitimate reasons for which one may be excused from fasting as mentioned in QS 2: 183, which are sickness and traveling. Islam permits ill-stricken people, whose health conditions can risk their lives or slow down their recovery or damage a part of their bodies, or upon their doctor's opinion, from fasting. Regarding COVID-19, infected patients may be permitted to skip their fast if their health condition is critical and are advised by doctors not to fast because they need to keep taking medicine.

According to a UK-based National Institute on Aging, evidence from decades of animal and human research shows the wide-ranging health benefits of fasting. The institute conducted a review of the research, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which pointed that human clinical trials have shown that fasting can in fact lead to improvements in health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers, and neurological disorders. The review

said more research is still needed to determine whether fasting yields benefits or is even feasible for humans when practiced over the long term.

Therefore, based on the feedback from the WHO, which says that drinking water does not protect a person from catching the COVID-19 virus and Diyanet's guidance, fasting is a duty and a must for Muslims to observe this year.

COVID-19 vaccine while fasting.

According to various Muftis (Islamic jurists qualified to issue a nonbinding opinion on a point of Islamic law), fasting is not invalidated by any vaccine, including the COVID-19 jab, which does not contain nutritious or intoxicating substances.

Anything that enters through the pores of the skin, veins, or muscles does not break the fast. The fast only breaks when something enters directly into the stomach or brain or via an open passage like the throat, nose, and ears.

“The same fatwa was given during the Ottoman period and since the 1930s, more similar fatwas have been issued. However, it is however recommended to make evening appointments to get COVID-19 jabs.

In this respect, the use of vaccines including that of COVID-19, which are stated to be protective against the pandemic by specialist physicians do not invalidate fast.

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