

28 July 2020 – On the occasion of the Muslim feast of Eid al-Adha, WHO has issued interim guidance entitled "Eid al-Adha safe practices in the context of COVID-19 pandemic". The document highlights public health advice for social and religious practices and gatherings during Eid al-Adha that can be applied across different national contexts.

The guidance informs individuals, families, communities and governments on how to make this religious occasion safer and encourages adoption of key measures to prevent and minimize the spread of the COVID-19 infection. The guidance focuses on social gatherings, physical distancing, animal-human interface and sacrificial slaughter, prayers and charity.

The guidance recommends avoiding large numbers of people gathering in public places, strictly maintaining a distance of at least 1 metre between people, and/or to wearing a fabric mask, discouraging slaughter at home and increasing the number or capacity of slaughter facilities, and encouraging good hygiene practices.

WHO recommends that any decision to restrict, modify, postpone, cancel, or proceed with a mass gathering during Eid al-Adha should be based on a standardized risk assessment exercise, taking into account current epidemiological trends, capacities and resources.

Interim guidance note

Safe Eid al Adha practices in the context of COVID-19

Interim guidance

25 July 2020



Background

The Eid al Adha¹ is a festival marked by social and religious gatherings where Muslim families and friends unite to pray together and give alms, especially in the form of sacrificed animal meat.²

The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily by human-to-human transmission of secretions of saliva and respiratory droplets, which are produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. Infection can also occur when individuals touch contaminated surfaces and then the eyes, nose or mouth before cleaning their hands.³

There is also evidence of COVID-19 transmission at the human-animal interface. Current evidence suggests that humans infected with SARS-CoV-2 can infect other mammals, including dogs, cats, and farmed mink. However, it remains unclear whether or not these infected mammals pose a significant risk for transmission back to humans.³ Nevertheless, other zoonotic diseases are associated with livestock and have resulted in disease outbreaks.⁴

Several countries have implemented physical and social distancing measures aimed at interrupting transmission by reducing interaction between people, such as the closing of mosques, monitoring of public gatherings and other restrictions on movement and gatherings. These measures are fundamental control mechanisms to control the spread of infectious diseases, particularly respiratory infections, associated with large gatherings of people. These measures are gradually relaxing in most countries where the virus has been brought under control; but, in some situations, increases in cases have been subsequently observed.⁵ Increased numbers of COVID-19 cases associated with and in parallel to Ramadan activities this year, particularly during family visits, congregate prayers and gatherings have been seen across countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Social and religious gatherings and animal slaughter are central to Eid al Adha. Hence, preventive measures, including risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) strategies directed towards individuals, families, communities and governments are required to promote behavioural messages and encourage adoption of key measures to prevent and minimize the spread of the infection.

Purpose

This document highlights public health advice for social and religious practices and gatherings during Eid al Adha that can be applied across different national contexts.

Informed decision making on conducting social and religious gatherings

Cancelling social and religious gatherings should be seriously considered. WHO recommends that any decision to restrict, modify, postpone, cancel, or proceed with holding a mass gathering should be based on a standardized risk assessment exercise, taking into account current epidemiological trends, capacities, and resources.⁶ These decisions should be part of a comprehensive approach taken by national authorities to respond to the pandemic.

¹ "Festival of the sacrifice" in Arabic. Also known as Eid Qurban

² Muslims around the world slaughter an animal – a goat, sheep, cow or camel – during Eid al Adha

³ World Health Organization. Transmission of SARS-CoV-2: implications for infection prevention precautions. Scientific brief, 9 July 2020. <https://www.who.int/publications/item/modes-of-transmission-of-virus-causing-covid-19-implications-for-ipc-precaution-recommendations>

⁴ World Health Organization. Disease Outbreak News, Archives by disease. <https://www.who.int/csr/don/archive/disease/en/>

⁵ World Health Organization. Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard. <https://covid19.who.int/>

⁶ World Health Organization. Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19 – publication, risk assessment tool, decision tree, 2020. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance-publications>