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-Adha is a festival marked by social and religious gatherings where Muslim families and friends come together and give thanks, especially in the form of sacrificing an animal.*

The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily by droplet and contact transmission of secretion 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 washing their hands.†

There is also evidence of COVID-19 transmission at the human-animal interface. Current evidence suggests that humans infected with SARS-CoV-2 can shed other materials, including droplets, saliva, and faecal matter. However, it remains unclear whether or not these shed materials pose a significant risk for transmission back to humans. Nevertheless, other emerging diseases are associated with livestock and have resulted in disease outbreaks.‡

Several countries have implemented personal and social distancing measures around or involving transmission by reducing interaction between people, such as the closure of markets, limitation of public gatherings and other restrictions on movements 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 particularly effective in reducing the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Since the outbreak, several countries have implemented restrictions on gatherings. Increased numbers of COVID-19 cases associated with social activities in parallel to the Eid al-Adha activities for this year, particularly during family meals, congregational prayers and gatherings have been seen across countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Social and religious gatherings and animal sacrifice 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 present behavioral 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 cancel, 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, capacity, and resources.§ These decisions should be part of a comprehensive approach taken by national authorities in response to the pandemic.

* “Festival of the sacrifice” in Arabic. Also known as Eid Qurban
† Muslim around the world celebrate it known as a gift, thank, or visit – during Eid al-Adha.