



Dear family, friends, and colleagues in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region and around the world,

Later this week, more than a billion and a half Muslims around the world will welcome the start of the holy month of Ramadan. One of the blessings of Ramadan is that Muslims can count on it every year to revive their spiritual and religious practices, which can become diluted among the chaotic hustle and bustle of daily life. While doing so, Muslims are reacquainted and reminded every year of fundamental teachings that they might have overlooked or forgotten along the remaining 11 months.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found ourselves marking Ramadan in a new world. As a result, we found ways of practising our usual religious and social traditions with new customs to maintain our faith, while protecting ourselves and our loved ones.

This year, COVID-19 is still part of our daily lives, affecting almost every decision we make and action we take. We have all found ways to adapt, but this does not mean ignoring how serious the situation remains. People are still getting infected and dying – with some of those infected requiring hospitalization, especially the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

In WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region, more than 340 000 people have tragically died since the start of the pandemic, and more than 21.5 million people have been infected. I send my thoughts and prayers to those who have lost family members and loved ones. May Allah have mercy on them all and their souls rest in eternal peace.

One of the teachings of Ramadan is to raise the awareness of our Islamic duty to protect ourselves and others from any kind of harm. The general understanding of Ramadan is that fasting during the holy month forbids Muslims from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset. However, fasting is so much more than that. Muslims are also required to abstain from the smallest act — or even emotion — that could cause the slightest harm to another human being. Knowing this, we should therefore be willing to take every possible social measure that could protect ourselves and others from infection or death.

Although we witnessed an overall improvement in cases and deaths in the Region and at global levels, we are still very much in the pandemic, and we need to remain alert to avoid further grief and suffering. It is in the hands of every single one of us to make sure that our decisions and actions do not ultimately lead to a disastrous outcome for anyone we may unknowingly infect, causing the infection to further spread. The chain of transmission can only be stopped if we all make a conscious and collective decision to stop this disease in its tracks.

But we also mark the start of Ramadan this year with a glimmer of hope, as our Region advances to almost 40% of all people fully vaccinated with one or more doses. Vaccines are the most effective shields against severe disease and death, especially when coupled with other preventative measures like hand hygiene, mask use and physical distancing.

As countries continue to cancel or reduce public health and social measures, vaccines remain one of the best ways to ensure that you and others remain protected. Vaccines may not always prevent infection, but they will significantly reduce your risk of becoming severely ill or dying.

As we enter the holy month of Ramadan, those who mark this religious event can still get vaccinated when they are called to do so, even when fasting. Intramuscular injections are permitted under Islamic Sharia Law, and do not break one's fast as they do not supply any nourishment or reach the stomach.

Despite the trials we have all faced over the past 2 years, we can keep the spirit of Ramadan alive. And let that spirit be guided by our desire to protect lives and preserve our humanity. Let us remember the saying in the Holy Qur'an that states: "whoever saves a life is as though he had saved all mankind." Whether Muslim or non-Muslim, it is our social responsibility and duty as human beings to do all we can to work together and stop a virus that has killed 6 million

vulnerable people. This spirit of solidarity is also reflected in our Regional vision of “Health for All, by All”.

I wish you all a blessed Ramadan, filled with hope, peace, good health, and blessings.

Related link

[Safe Ramadan practices in the context of COVID-19 and Emerging Variants](#)

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