



WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS THAT MUSLIMS MAY REQUIRE TO OBSERVE THEIR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES, DRESS OR HOLIDAYS

Below are some of the most common reasonable accommodations that Muslim employees may seek in the workplace, along with an accompanying explainer on each of these:

- o Requesting access to a private space to perform daily **prayer**
- o Taking time off work to celebrate **Eid**
- o **Religious dress** accommodations e.g. modest clothing
- o Reasonable requests regarding fasting in **Ramadan**, particularly in the context of playing sports
- o Not being pressured to drink **alcohol** or attend alcohol laden environments
- o **Halal food** and the avoidance of cross-contamination
- o Not being pressured to **shake hands** with members of the opposite gender

This resource has been designed by the Islamophobia Register Australia to help employees make reasonable requests for religious accommodations, and to help explain some of the complexities that may be involved to their employers. If you would like to seek further information or clarification on the below, please do not hesitate to contact the Islamophobia Register Australia: contact@islamophobia.org.au

Prayers - Muslims are required by their faith to perform 5 daily prayers at set times. Although it will be dependent on their work hours, in many cases at least one or two of the daily prayers are likely to fall within work hours (or before the employee will have a chance to get home from work). As such, a Muslim employee may wish to request access to a private space, such as an empty meeting room or store room, to perform their daily prayers. Prior to performing the daily prayers, Muslims are required to perform ablution. A space with a sink would thus be preferable for employee's privacy during the ablution process, although employees can perform the ablution in public bathrooms if required. The process of ablution and prayer together usually takes around 10-15 minutes to perform. The employee will typically seek to minimise disruption to their work where possible.

Religious dress - Modest dress, including the headscarf or *hijab* is practised by many Muslim girls and women as a part of their faith. Some Muslim girls may not wear the hijab but may still wish to dress modestly in accordance with their faith, such as by donning pants instead of a skirt or long-sleeved shirts instead of short-sleeved shirts. Similarly, many Muslim boys and men practice modest dress such as through the avoidance of wearing shorts above the knee or the avoidance of revealing their chest when swimming. These religious dress observances apply irrespective of the physical setting (for example, they apply

during sports and swimming as well). Muslim employees may therefore request that accommodations for dress be made for them. The employee will typically observe work uniform requirements to the greatest extent possible (for example, by observing uniform colours).

Eid - Eid is a religious holiday that is celebrated by Muslims twice a year. Its significance for Muslims can be compared to Christmas and Easter for Christians. Muslims typically take the day off work to attend the mosque and celebrate with their loved ones. The Islamic calendar runs by the lunar calendar rather than the solar calendar, so the precise dates for Eid change each year. Additionally, the exact day of Eid cannot always be known in advance because it is dependent on moon-sighting and different Muslims determine the day of Eid differently. While some Muslims follow a scientific method of moon-sighting whereby Eid day can be known in advance, for many other Muslims, the moon must be sighted with the naked eye and therefore they will not know which day Eid is until the night before. Therefore, while Muslim employees should be able to offer an approximate day for Eid, the precise date may not be known to them until the evening beforehand and it's important that flexibility be shown to them and that this be accommodated for.

Ramadan - Muslims are required to abstain from consuming any food or drink (including water) from sunrise to sunset, during the month of Ramadan. This is a holy month for Muslims and a time for reflection, cleansing and charity. Fasting can be physically demanding, particularly in hot weather, and any reasonable requests for accommodations made by the employee should be considered. For example, an employee may wish to adjust their work hours during this month so as to start earlier and finish earlier, to be home in time to break fast with their family.

Alcohol - Drinking alcohol is forbidden in Islam and Muslim employees should not be expected or pressured to drink alcohol for any reason. Many Muslims also believe that it is forbidden to attend alcohol-laden environments such as bars, or may feel uncomfortable in alcohol-laden environments such as after-work drinks. This should not result in them being penalised in any way and in this case, we would encourage workplaces to discuss alternative networking opportunities with those employees.

Halal food - Many Muslims observe a halal diet, which means that the meat they eat needs to be slaughtered in a particular way and certain requirements need to be met. Additionally, they avoid anything containing bacon, pork or other swine products, or meat products from non-halal meat. Many Muslims will also avoid eating foods that have been cross-contaminated with bacon or other non-halal meats. Access to halal meat products/foods would be ideal to cater for the needs of Muslim employees (for example, in the context of work functions and events). Where this isn't possible, it is important that the

halal options (in this context, the vegetarian options) be labelled and kept separate from the non-halal/vegetarian foods such that cross-contamination is avoided.

Handshaking - Some Muslims may wish to refrain from shaking hands with members of the opposite gender or partaking in any activity that may require them to touch a member of the opposite gender on religious grounds. We therefore request that employees are not made to feel pressured or penalised for not wanting to shake hands with members of the opposite gender.

We thank you for being accommodating to this employee's needs. Please do not hesitate to contact the Islamophobia Register Australia if you have any questions, or if you would like to book a Bystander Intervention and Inclusivity workshop for your workplace.

<https://islamophobia.com.au>