



Helpful Hints for Ramadan: Tips for Complying with the Law

- The U.S. Constitution and other laws such as the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (“RLUIPA”) and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (“RFRA”) protect prisoners’ and detainees’ rights to practice their religion according to their sincerely held beliefs.
- Prisons and detention centers **MUST** allow Muslim inmates to fast during Ramadan if they so desire.¹ However, the prison can take some measures to alleviate logistical and safety concerns. One example is requiring inmates to sign up a certain number of days before the start of Ramadan in order to be allowed to fast. If this method is taken, alternative plans should be made for people who were necessarily unable to sign up in time, like new admissions to the prison. If this is done, the process and the deadline must be clearly publicized.
- Prison administrators and staff must ensure that meals are being served at appropriate times because of the stringent timing of the start and end of fasts.
 - This means that the morning meal must be served **before** dawn and the evening meal must be served shortly **before or at sunset**.^{2, 3}
 - Meals from previous normally timed meals can be repurposed **if** they are stored appropriately (e.g., in a fridge/freezer, in a secure pantry if shelf stable goods).
 - Inmates who are fasting must be provided an adequate supply of potable water so that they do not become dehydrated.⁴
- Muslims who are fasting may not ingest anything, including medication, while fasting.⁵ Therefore, medical staff should make efforts to adjust dosage and timings of medication where possible.
- There are certain categories of people who may be exempt from fasting, including the elderly, the sick (either temporary illness or chronic such as Type 1 diabetes), or those pregnant or breastfeeding.⁶ However, this decision is personal to the individual and **may not** be made by prison officials. Inmates who cannot fast for one of these reasons should receive meals as they normally would, and also be allowed to attend any and all Ramadan-related programming, such as nightly prayers.
- Common Ramadan accommodations include:
 - Adjusting work schedules or assignments so that fasting inmates are not forced to do physically exhausting jobs, either indoors or outdoors, while fasting
 - Providing meals outside of the normal meal service times
 - Facilitating nightly, congregational prayers

If you have any questions or would like any clarification, please contact CLCMA at (972) 914-2507. This handout **should not be construed as legal advice** and is for **informational and educational purposes only**. Please feel free to circulate to anyone you feel may benefit from this handout.



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1. *Lovelace v. Lee*, 472 F.3d 174 (5th Cir. 2006).
2. *Toney v. Harrod*, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 173946 (D. Kan. 2017).
3. *Evans v. Jabe*, 2014 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 6454 (D. Va. 2014).
4. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 833 (1994) (imposing a duty on prisons to treat prisoners humanely, including providing adequate water supply).
5. Bashir Laway & Hamid Ashraf, *Basic Rules of Ramadan: A medico-religious perspective*, 65 J. Pak. Med. Ass'n S-14 (2015).
6. *Id.*