

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Monday, April 26, 2021

Contact: San Francisco Joint Information Center, dempres@sfgov.org

***** PRESS RELEASE *****

**SAN FRANCISCO OPENS PRAYER ROOMS AT HIGH VOLUME
VACCINATION SITES FOR RAMADAN**

Prayer rooms ensure that practicing Muslims do not have to choose between prayer and getting vaccinated during the holy month of Ramadan

A press availability and tour of the Moscone Center South prayer room is scheduled for Monday, April 26 at 1:30 p.m. at Moscone Center, details below.

SAN FRANCISCO - The Department of Public Health and the Department of Emergency Management announce new prayer rooms at San Francisco's high-volume COVID-19 vaccination sites during Ramadan. Created in collaboration with District 6 Supervisor Matt Haney and Human Rights Commissioner and Interfaith Council Board Member Hala Hijazi, the initiative helps support equitable vaccine access for Muslims during the month-long religious celebration and beyond.

Ramadan, observed between April 12 and May 12, is considered one of the holiest months of the year for Muslims. In addition to including a safe space for prayer, the SF Market in the Bayview and Moscone Center vaccination sites have a system in place to allow individuals who step aside to pray to keep their place in line as well as a designated area in which they can break their fast with access to drinking water. Muslims pray five times a day and fast between dawn and sunset during Ramadan. Open to all faiths, the prayer rooms offer privacy from public view, are outfitted with prayer rugs and are large enough to accommodate social distancing.

“San Francisco is well ahead of the national average when it comes to vaccinating our residents and we’re going to continue doing everything we can to make sure that everyone has access to the vaccines in a way that is easy and accessible,” said Mayor Breed. “We want everyone observing Ramadan to still be able to pray while going through the process of getting vaccinated, and I want to thank all of the community members and City staff who have worked to make this possible.”

San Francisco, which is home to approximately 7,000 Muslims, modeled its guidelines and best practices to allow Muslims to access vaccines during Ramadan from a program of the New York City Commission on Human Rights. The initiative's literature, which suggests offering service during hours when people will not be fasting, is being disseminated at the vaccination sites in English and Arabic.

“Since the beginning of the vaccine roll out, the Department of Public Health has been committed to providing equitable access to vaccines,” says Dr. Grant Colfax, director of the

Department of Public Health. “Providing prayer rooms ensures that these spaces are welcoming, and we hope their presence helps eliminate barriers to access that may be preventing those in the Muslim community from getting vaccinated. On behalf of the Department of Public Health, I wish all Muslims a blessed Ramadan.”

“The role of emergency management is to provide resources and remove obstacles to ensure an effective response to an emergency,” says Mary Ellen Carroll, executive director of the Department of Emergency Management. “Since the beginning of this pandemic, the Department of Emergency Management has prioritized equitable access to what our communities need to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Providing this safe and grounding space for prayer while getting vaccinated is one example of how our city’s response to COVID-19 strives to make access to the vaccine as comfortable and culturally competent as possible.”

According to District 6 Supervisor Matt Haney, who represents the Tenderloin, which is home to the largest concentration of Muslims in the City, "This is a critical effort to improve access to the vaccine for all members of our community during the holy month of Ramadan. Our Muslim residents must have equitable access to the vaccine as well as our support in ensuring they can practice their faith."

“Equity and access to critical services by underserved and vulnerable populations have led to increased trust within our diverse communities and with the City,” states Human Rights Commissioner Hala Hijazi. “Whether we are providing food vouchers to residents in the Tenderloin or safe places to get vaccinated and pray during these difficult times, we are meeting the needs of our communities where they live, work, play, and pray. We are grateful for the City’s leadership who have been on the frontlines setting precedents and impacting lives.”

Press Availability Details

WHAT: COVID Command Center will hold a press availability to announce the availability of prayer rooms at two of the City’s high-volume vaccination sites: Moscone and SF Market.

WHEN: Monday, April 26 at 1:30 PM; Press should arrive by 1:00 PM for set up.

WHERE: Moscone high-volume vaccination site. Meet under “Enter Here” sign.

WHO: City leaders, including District 6 Supervisor Matt Haney, Commissioner Hala Hijazi, Director of Health Dr. Grant Colfax and Director of the Department of Emergency Management Mary Ellen Carroll will be joined by members of the Muslim community to officially open the prayer room at Moscone Center.

CONTACT: Kate Patterson, 415-312-9685