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**Subject:** FW: EARLY Community Guidelines during COVID-19 Pandemic  
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**From:** North Jersey Board of Rabbis <[sweettastesoftorah@gmail.com](mailto:sweettastesoftorah@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 1, 2020 2:01 PM **To:** Cliff Miller <[CLMILLER@JTSA.EDU](mailto:CLMILLER@JTSA.EDU)>  
**Subject:** Community Guidelines during COVID-19 Pandemic

## **North Jersey Board of Rabbis Suggested Community Guidelines During COVID-19 Pandemic Updated March 22, 2020 | 26 Adar 5780**

Given the intensity of the COVID-19 outbreak, the North Jersey Board of Rabbis issued the following personal and community-wide guidelines which will help curb the widespread nature of this illness. This statement serves as an update to our previous set of guidelines issued on March 15, 2020. It is also posted on our website at [www.sweettastesoftorah.weebly.com](http://www.sweettastesoftorah.weebly.com).

Having consulted with medical experts, the NJ Department of Health, government and community leaders, and based on what we have learned regarding the profound impact that social distancing can have on curbing the widespread nature of this pandemic, we are urging that synagogue communities adhere to the following guidelines until the emergency passes, in an effort to assist in containing the number of cases of individuals affected with COVID-19 as well as offer support:

### **Emergency Need for Personal Protective Equipment:**

- Hospitals are experiencing a severe shortage of medical personal protective equipment. If you have gloves or masks to donate, please call your local hospital to ask about potential collections. To minimize contagions, we recommend that synagogues not collect these materials directly.

### **Community-Wide Closures, including Shabbat and Weekday Worship Services:**

- Synagogue and community buildings should be closed with the exception of essential personnel so that the community can continue to function virtually for its members.
- All in-person programming (including Hebrew Schools, Nursery Schools, classes, meetings, meals and worship services) should be suspended and meetings be held through virtual platforms or conference calls. Community members should not gather privately in a home for a minyan.
- Individual rabbis should guide their communities regarding the use of live streaming services on Shabbat and holidays. Alternatively, we encourage online Kabbalat Shabbat services prior to sundown on Friday and/or Maariv/Havdalah services after sundown on Saturday night so members of the community can be part of an online

- prayer space.
- Individual rabbis should guide their communities regarding the constitution of a virtual minyan.
  - All communal buildings should be regularly sanitized.

#### **Passover Observance:**

- In-person sederim should be limited to those who are currently in one's home only, with the option - upon consultation with one's rabbi - of inviting others virtually to the seder.
- This is not a year to invoke stringencies. Individual rabbis are encouraged to offer guidelines on permitted leniencies during these unique circumstances.
- Due to the shortage of cleaning supplies, we urge that a minimum amount is used for ritual Pesach cleaning.
- Synagogues and other communities should provide digital haggadot and other online resources to assist family celebrations of the holiday.
- Synagogues are urged to organize lists of Kosher for Passover catering options, as well as Kosher for Passover food and delivery options.
- The sale of hametz should be done virtually, at the guidance of individual rabbis.
- Siyyum Bechorot, gatherings for the firstborn who would otherwise fast before Passover, should be moved to a virtual space.
- Yizkor services should be organized virtually under the guidance of individual rabbis.

#### **Lifecycle Events:**

- *B'nei Mitzvah:* In-person b'nei mitzvah celebrations should be postponed. If the family opts to reschedule to a later date for an in-person service, consideration shall be given, in consultation with individual rabbis, to the recitation of Torah readings and haftarot that students have prepared for a particular parashah on alternative dates. If families prefer a virtual b'nei mitzvah experience, individual rabbis should be consulted regarding the possibility of implementation.
- *Funerals:* Funerals should be restricted to graveside-only funerals, with immediate family-only. Shiva visits should be done over the phone or video conferencing. Individual rabbis should offer guidance regarding the potential of reciting Mourner's Kaddish in a virtual space. Individual funeral homes and cemeteries may have additional restrictions, which may further limit attendance or rituals at funerals (no exchange of shovels, etc.)
- *Britot and Baby Namings:* The rabbi and mohel should be consulted on the advisability of postponing a brit. If a brit occurs, it should be limited to parents, baby and mohel only. Families should consult with their individual rabbis and mohel about the desire to move a naming ceremony to a later time when families can safely gather.
- Pidyon/peter-rehem ceremonies should be postponed.

#### **Personal and Family Guidelines:**

- Except for workers deemed as "essential," people should remain and work from home. Everyone should stay in the home in which they live and remain there until the emergency passes. Moving from one house to another - even to the homes of parents, grandparents, siblings and children - is jeopardizing one's safety and the safety of the public.
- No in-person play dates or meal invitations are permitted. Virtual play dates and social gatherings are encouraged.
- Except for essential workers, one should only leave the house to get essentials such as prescriptions and food. If one goes into businesses, they should cover their faces and hands to the extent possible to minimize exposure to the virus and immediately shower upon arriving home.
- Social distancing is crucial. This means that one should not come within six feet of

- someone else who is not in their home.
- Walks, bike-riding, running and other forms of recreation are encouraged, so long as social distancing guidelines (see above) are followed.
  - Communities are charged with the responsibility of organizing a limited number of people to volunteer to help support other at-risk or home-bound community members. Volunteers should be held to the highest level of safety measures, including use of gloves and masks.

**If you are Ill:**

- If you are experiencing symptoms, please consult your healthcare provider. Additionally, the Center for Disease Control has created an online bot to help people trouble-shoot their symptoms: Please see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/index.html> for more information.

**Community Notifications of Potential Exposure:**

- Synagogues and communities are urged to request that constituents share information about their personal exposure to or confirmation of COVID-19. This information is to be kept confidential. As much information as possible should be requested, such as when the person was in a shared space, if they have children who attend school in the community, etc.
- Communities should share exposure information with community members so they are aware of potential exposure. Communities should urge those impacted to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Please understand that these guidelines are ones that we offer with a heavy heart, knowing the significance that communal religious experiences have on us as we celebrate the joys and cope with the sorrows of life. We convey our dedication to ensure that alternative support mechanisms are in place to help you and your family during this difficult time and for all other pastoral and religious needs.

We urge all community leaders to be sensitive to all those affected, whether through illness, financial impact, or emotional concerns, and to work actively in organizing aid to those in need.

Our tradition teaches us that there is no greater mitzvah than pikuach nefesh, the saving of one's life. The time to make these changes to save lives is now and we call upon everyone in a position of leadership to do so. We add our prayers for healing of spirit and body.

**North Jersey Board of Rabbis**

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