

Halakhic Guidance from CJLS about Coronavirus

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News & Events

Please find information below from Rabbi Rabbi Elliot Dorff, CJLS chair, Pamela Barmash, CJLS co-chair, Rabbi Joshua Heller, chair of the Rites and Rituals Subcommittee, and Rabbi Ashira Konigsburg, Chief Operating Officer, providing guidance for individuals and communities affected by Coronavirus. Please note that this is not an official responsum of the CJLS.

In response to queries posed to the CJLS and the Rabbinical Assembly office about quarantines and closures due to the COVID-19 (known as the Coronavirus), we urge those who are ill to stay home, and those whom medical authorities have recommended for quarantine or self-quarantine to follow medical advice and stay in quarantine. *Pikuah nefesh*, protecting human life, overrides almost every other Jewish value.

A. All should follow advice regarding hygiene and handwashing. In particular:

1. Congregations should discourage handshaking and other direct physical contact
2. It is advisable to refrain from kissing ritual objects (Sifrei torah, communal talitot, siddurim, mezuzot) that are also kissed or touched directly by other individuals.

B. In some communities, it may be medically advisable, or mandated by health authorities, for people to stay away from congregational worship. In such cases we recommend the following:

1. Those who wish to be part of a weekday minyan to recite prayers requiring a minyan, including mourner's kaddish, may connect virtually (through audio or video) with a minyan (whether of their own congregation or another) whose members are meeting in person, preferably in their time zone. They may recite kaddish, kedushah, barkhu, etc, and hear Torah reading along with that minyan. For more information see [Minyan via the Internet](#) by Rabbi Avram Reisner
2. Congregational leadership should provide guidance for home davening and Torah study for those not able to attend Shabbat or Yom Tov services.

3. Our committee has not made a formal ruling on livestreaming on Shabbat and Yom Tov (a copy of the draft proposal is available to RA members by request), but for the current *sha'at hadehak*, (pressing circumstances) those congregations that are already offering streaming and that are still able to hold services with a minyan, should encourage members whose health may be at risk, or whose presence may be a risk to others, to stay home and make use of this option if the alternative would be to risk their own health or the health of others by attending services. Every attempt should be made to reduce potential violations of shabbat (for example, activating the stream before Shabbat or holiday, or having the stream activated in an unusual way, or by someone who is not of the Jewish faith).
4. If a congregation is in quarantine and not able to bring together a minyan for services, the leadership should provide guidance for home davenning and Torah study and/or provide a virtual link with another congregation through livestreaming.
5. Some poskim have expressed concern about whether one fulfills one's obligation to hear Megillah reading by doing so via amplification or electronic reproduction, declaring it to be similar to shofar, where the mitzvah is to "hear" the shofar, so the actual sound must be heard. In fact, the Mitzvah of megillah is described in terms of its reading: "*mikra megillah*." hearing it is just another form of reading it. Hearing the Megillah being read via telephone or live streaming, is permitted when necessary, so long as the sound is undistorted, live and not a recording.
6. Regarding Parashat Zakhor, which has a higher level of obligation than hearing the regular Torah reading, one could also fulfil the obligation by hearing it read by shabbat appropriate electronic means. If one cannot hear Zakhor read from a Torah scroll, then one is advised to read it at home and to hear the Torah reading on Purim day (if possible), or to hear the same verses when they are read again for Ki Tetze during the yearly Torah reading cycle.

The Talmud (Ketubot 8b) records the prayer of Reish Lakish "Master of the worlds, redeem and save, rescue and deliver Your people, Israel, from the pestilence and from the sword... and from all types of afflictions that suddenly erupt and come to the world. Before we call You are already responding. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who halts the plague."

We pray for healing for those who are ill and for health and wellness for us, our communities, and all people.