

Mikvah Guidance | The Rabbinical Assembly

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Please find below a letter from Rabbi Joshua Heller, chair of the CJLS rites and ritual subcommittee providing guidance for communities affected by COVID-19. Thanks to Rabbis Pamela Barmash, Susan Grossman and Ashira Konigsburg for contributions. Please note that this is not an official responsum of the CJLS.

We have received many questions about Mikvah use. In the current circumstances, any non-time-sensitive use of Mikvah should be postponed.

Understanding normative practice regarding niddah, and also the guidance we are receiving from mikvaot in various parts of the country, it is possible to sanitize mikvaot in a way that prevents disease transmission, and therefore some Mikvaot have instituted procedures which would allow for safe immersion. Anyone supervising a mikvah should institute a plan which includes comparable procedures, and anyone seeking to use a Mikvah should only do so if they can be confident that these procedures are followed.

1. Infectious disease experts have confirmed that chlorination levels typically mandated for spas (chlorine of 3-5 ppm , bromine of 4-6ppm) are sufficient to deactivate viruses like COVID-19. These chemical levels should be maintained rigorously, though UV treatment may allow for lower chemical levels. Time should be allowed between each user to check chemical levels and run the filtration system.
2. Anyone entering the mikvah must be screened for symptoms, and the mikvah may not be used by anyone who is symptomatic or has had a potential exposure within the last 14 days.
3. All preparation for mikvah must take place at home.
4. Dressing/prep room, and any surfaces that might be touched, must be sanitized regularly, in particular between users.
5. Mikvah guide/attendant should keep social distance from immersee (in a smaller facility, this may mean that the attendant is not in the immersion room with immersee). In Mikvaot where it is the practice for an attendant to inspect the immersee, this should be suspended.

Though monthly immersion traditionally takes place at night, there are clear halakhic precedents in times of *sakanah* - danger - to permit during doing so on the day following the evening when immersion would take place. This should certainly be allowed in cases

where there is a curfew or longer hours are needed to allow for proper sanitization between users.

One may also immerse in a lake, ocean, or spring-fed river, though there are also potential health and safety concerns.

In some communities, in which immersion may be forbidden by local health guidelines or might otherwise be judged to be unsafe, our committee has offered several possible approaches.

One suggests abstinence, but with the removal of any harhakot, allowing for the couple to engage in types of supportive physical intimacy and support which do not lead to intercourse.

There is also an approach to niddah and mikvah in a [teshuvah by Rabbi Susan Grossman](#). For this emergency only, a woman upon completing the 7th day after the start of her period, should bathe in her tub, making sure first to sanitize it if shared with others in her household. It is preferable if she can immerse her head and hair, even with the understanding that most bathtubs would not allow her to immerse her whole body completely at the same time.

For this emergency only, if she lacks a bathtub, or cannot safely sanitize a shared tub, she can shower for the time it takes to use 40 Kabim of water, approximately 11.25 gallons of water*. Following such washing, the couple may resume intimate relationships. Such leniency is applicable only for this emergency.

The Israeli Va'ad Halakhah takes a different point of view and suggests that if it is impossible to immerse in a mikvah due to COVID-19, a couple should refrain from the mitzvot of “be fruitful and multiply” and sexual intercourse. But for the purpose of mutual support and intimacy in this time, it is possible to be lenient in harhakot such as physical touch, hugging and kissing. One rabbi thinks that if it will not be possible to immerse in a mikvah for three months or longer, there would be cause to consider allowing immersion in a swimming pool or even a bathtub that contains 40 seah of water and therefore not to declare a requirement to abstain from intercourse.

Consult your rabbi for advice.