

## Guidelines for Mikvaot – protection against COVID-19

5 April 2020

These guidelines have been prepared for Mikvaot by the United Synagogue with the approval of the Chief Rabbi and the London Beth Din. The guidelines must be implemented by Mikvah attendants and those who have responsibility for the running of Mikvaot.

### Guidelines for women who would like to visit the Mikvah.

#### Who can visit the Mikvah?

- Women **cannot attend the Mikvah** for 7 days if they have cough **or** fever (temp of 37.8C or higher) **or** loss of sense of smell and taste **or** feeling unwell
- Women who are in isolation with a family/household member as per the government guidelines **cannot attend the Mikvah.** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-householdswith-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>)
- Women **cannot attend the Mikvah** if exposed to someone with coronavirus symptoms. This would be 14 days from the last point of contact with that individual.

Women **cannot attend the Mikvah** if they fall into either the ‘vulnerable’ or ‘extremely vulnerable’ categories:

#### ‘Vulnerable’ people

If Mikvah users have any of the following characteristics or health conditions, they are ‘vulnerable’, meaning they are at high risk of severe illness from coronavirus. They should be very strict in following social distancing measures and **cannot attend the Mikvah**:

- chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
- chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), or cerebral palsy
- diabetes
- problems with your spleen - for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed
- a weakened immune system as the result of medical conditions or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)

#### Extremely Vulnerable:

If Mikvah users have a serious underlying health condition, they are ‘extremely vulnerable’, meaning they are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus. They should follow PHE (Public Health England) guidance on shielding for themselves, their family, friends and carers. Women in the ‘extremely vulnerable’ group at risk of coronavirus **cannot attend Mikvah.**

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This includes people who:

- have had an organ transplant
- are having certain types of cancer treatment
- have blood or bone marrow cancer such as leukaemia
- have a severe lung condition such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma (requiring hospital admissions or courses of steroid tablets)
- have a condition or are taking medicine that makes them much more likely to get infections

#### **Before attending the Mikvah:**

- You should contact the Mikvah in advance in order to book an appointment and to be sent a copy of their protocols if available.
- When booking an appointment, all women will need to answer screening questions by the attendant.
- Women should complete their preparations at home. You should arrive at the Mikvah ready to immerse, only needing to comb your hair. Towels will be provided by the mikvaot, unless you are told otherwise.

#### **When visiting the Mikvah:**

- To minimise contamination risk, you should leave all belongings and other unnecessary items at home or in their cars.
- One wishing to make a donation to the Mikvah should do so by BACS or online via one of the charity companies in advance of use. Contactless card payments will be accepted at those Mikvaot which have this facility. Cash or vouchers should not be accepted at the Mikvah.
- Upon entering the Mikvah you will be asked to thoroughly wash your hands with warm water and soap outside of the bathrooms for 20 seconds. You will need to do repeat this upon leaving the Mikvah. Alcohol based hand sanitisers should not be used.
- Women should not use the shower at the Mikvah, before or after immersion.
- You must ensure that you maintain a 2 metre distance between yourself and the Mikvah attendant **at all times**.

If you have any specific queries relating to your local mikvah please contact them directly for more information.

#### **Guidelines for Mikvah attendants:**

Mikvah attendants should be exceptionally stringent about social distancing both in her professional and personal capacity. For the protection of Mikvah attendant and the public, communities will ensure that attendants are not in a Covid-19 risk category.

#### **Basic protocols for Mikvah attendants:**

- Proper hand-washing with soap and water should be performed for at least 20 seconds between users. Hand sanitiser is not to be used in place of soap and water.
- All attendants must be trained on proper hand-washing.
- Masks are not required at this time.
- The preparation rooms, bathrooms, Cheder haTevila (immersion room), Mikvah steps (where the water does not reach) and other areas of the Mikvah must be fully cleaned and disinfected between users by the on-site cleaning staff.

- You must ensure that you maintain a 2 metre distance between yourself and the attendee **at all times**.

**These measures should be strictly enforced.**

Mikvaot must implement an appointment system, to ensure that there are the minimum number of women necessary inside the Mikvah building at any time. There should not be more than one woman in the waiting room.

Appointments should be spaced out to allow time for disinfection of surfaces in-between each use. A woman should not need to spend longer than 15 minutes in the Mikvah building.

All women should be screened by the attendant both when an appointment is made, and on arrival at the Mikvah.

Screening questions should ensure women do not fall into the following categories:

- Women **cannot attend the Mikvah** for 7 days if they have cough **or** fever (temp of 37.8C or higher) **or** loss of sense of smell and taste **or** feeling unwell
- Women who are in isolation with a family/household member as per the government guidelines **cannot attend the Mikvah**. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-householdswith-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>)
- Women **cannot attend the Mikvah** if exposed to someone with coronavirus symptoms. This would be 14 days from the last point of contact with that individual.
- Women **cannot attend the Mikvah** if they fall into either the 'vulnerable' or 'extremely vulnerable' categories (See above).

All preparation items should be removed from the Mikvah preparation rooms.

The Mikvah should be providing users with towels which have been washed at the correct temperature (minimum of 60 degrees) and single use slippers.

Mikvaot should consider placing a towel on the floor in front of the stairs to the Mikvah for each lady so that the water does not drip onto the floor.

The water's pH should be between 7-8. Chlorine concentration should be 1.5-3mg/litre and bromine, if used, should be 3-6mg/litre. Water should be changed regularly.