

Coronavirus: Guidance for Synagogues Yom Kippur and Succot Update 25 September 2020

The guidance supersedes the guidance of 7th August 2020

Dear Chairs, Rabbis and Rebbetzins,

We hope that you are all well.

Thank you for sharing details of your Rosh Hashanah services with us either via the survey or through calls and messages. Your feedback has been very valuable. Whilst we understand that people missed the sense of achdut that is derived from being together with the whole community, we also heard that many people experienced a greater sense of spirituality in this year's quieter services.

The feedback has also shown that people felt safe in our Covid-secure settings. This is thanks to the meticulous planning by your teams and the hard work of your volunteers.

Although this week has brought with it additional restrictions from government, you will have seen that services in places of worship can continue as before. This allows us proceed with Yom Kippur plans.

Please see below some general points to note as well as specific guidance on Yom Kippur, Succot and Simchat Torah

General points

- Please remind members (and all volunteers) to avoid congregating in groups either outside the shul or on their way to and from services.
- In services and elsewhere on site, wardens, stewards and volunteers should maintain a 2-metre distance from the people with whom they are talking. We realise that, with masks, it can be difficult for people to hear what is being said. People might consider moving to another space to ensure that they can be heard rather than move closer to each other. However, if someone is hard of hearing, it is permitted to lower your mask so that your mouth is visible.

Yom Kippur

- Hand sanitiser may be used on Yom Kippur as needed.
- Many people with living parents have the custom to leave the shul during the Yizkor service. In a normal year, this can lead to crowds gathering in hallways and outdoors. This Yom Kippur, communities must have stewards in place to ensure that those who leave the shul remain socially distant. Alternatively, communities might consider moving

Yizkor to the end of the Mussaf service. This would prevent people gathering as those who do not wish to be in Yizkor could leave to go home.

Succot

- Earlier this month we had suggested ways of allowing the use of communal Arba Minim this year and, for obvious reasons, we were keen to facilitate this. However, the situation has changed since then, restrictions have tightened and we have received a very clear message from government that we should not facilitate the use of shared items in any way. With regret, therefore, please note that communities must not make communal sets of Arba Minim available to members, youth or children.
- For those who bring their own Arba Minim to shul, it is important to ensure that they are not touched or used by others.
- Hoshanot should be carried out in a socially distant manner with 2 metres between each individual. This could be achieved by widening the circle around the bimah or by asking some people to remain in their seats. The leader and all participants must wear face coverings.
- This year the communal Succah cannot be a place where we socialise over kiddush. However, it should be available for those who do not have a Succah at home so that they can fulfil the mitzvah.
- In order to enable safe use of the communal Succah on Yom Tov:
 - Construct the Succah so that it is as open-sided as possible and as close to an outdoor space as is halachically possible. There should not be chairs in the succah.
 - Ask those who wish to use the shul Succah to queue in a socially distant way outside the Succah or, alternatively, wait in the shul if demand is high. (Those who can fulfil the mitzvah at home should be encouraged to leave.)
 - It is essential that social distancing is observed within the Succah so that there is a distance of 3m between household groups/support bubbles. If there is insufficient space to allow this, only one household or support bubble should be inside the Succah at any one time.
 - Members should sanitise their hands on entering the Succah.
 - Members should collect a small bottle or carton of drink and a pre-packed biscuit in order to make kiddush and say 'layshev ba'succah'.
 - Once members have said kiddush and eaten the biscuit, standing, they should leave to make space for others to enter. (Please note that it is not necessary for those making the bracha or eating to be seated.)
- Some communities might wish to make their communal Succah available in the week for members. In order to ensure safe use of the communal Succah on weekdays:
 - A nominated individual must oversee proceedings
 - Members must book in time slots to use the Succah
 - Only one household or support bubble must eat in the Succah at any one time
 - Only packaged kosher food may be consumed.
 - The Succah must be cleaned in between each use i.e. between each household

Simchat Torah

- Sadly, this year, Simchat Torah cannot involve the exuberant singing and dancing which we normally associate with the festival. Many communities are planning pre-Yom Tov celebrations instead including home deliveries, drive-throughs and online events.
- In the services, however, even without the dancing, the hakafot (circuits) remain an integral part of the service. They must be carried out in a socially distant manner.
- During hakafot the service leader must wear a face covering.
- Sifrei Torah should be handled by as few people as possible. More specifically, no more than one person should touch or carry a particular scroll over the course of the festival. The most straightforward way to achieve this is by asking the same people to carry the Sifrei Torah for all seven hakafot in the evening and morning.
- Each person carrying a Sefer Torah must take it from the Aron and replace it there and should have the physical ability to do so. Under no circumstances should Sifrei Torah be passed from one person to another.
- Chatanim can be honoured and leynung can be carried out as per our usual guidelines. However, this year a tallis cannot be held over each Chatan.

If someone presents with symptoms on Shabbat or Yom Tov

Many of you have asked for advice on what to do if you hear that a member who attended a service goes on to have symptoms or is tested positive for Covid given that we are not permitted to use the phone or access online advice. We have outlined a protocol below.

- This is not a replacement for advice from doctors, PHE or Test and Trace.
- It is critical that those with symptoms or a positive test result do not return to shul.
- If a member who attended a service on Shabbat or Yom Tov discovers the next day that they have symptoms or is notified that they are Covid-positive, they should try to get a message to an Honorary Officer. As their household must self-isolate, we note that this will be challenging.
- The information required by the shul is:
 - *Where did you sit?* There should be additional cleaning in this area of the shul
 - *Were you less than 2 metres away from anyone for 20 minutes or more?* If this was the case, HOs should advise this individual/these individuals and their household/s to self-isolate until they can contact Test and Trace/book a test
 - *Who were your nearest neighbours in shul i.e. who was sitting in a 2m circle around you?* As an additional precaution, HOs should ask these people not to return to shul over the rest of Yom Tov. HOs should contact the public health team immediately after Yom Tov to confirm that these individuals do not need to self-isolate.
- Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions about this protocol.

We realise that this note is detailed but at this time it is our responsibility to prioritise safety in every aspect of our festival services and practice.

With our thanks to you and your teams for your understanding, your leadership and your dedication to your communities.

Jo Grose, Director of Communities
Rabbi Nicky Liss, Chair, Rabbinic Council of the United Synagogue
15 September 2020