

Purim Covid Guidance **February 2021**

This guidance supplements all previous United Synagogue Covid guidance [here](#) and should be read alongside it. It also builds on the recent London Beth Din psak, ruling, sent to US Rabbis and Chairs to help them guide their members on how best to fulfil the mitzvah of hearing the megillah this year.

This has been summarised in the paragraph below.

Ordinarily, adults have an obligation to hear the megillah in person both in the evening and day of Purim. If you can hear a reading in shul or from somebody else whilst complying with government and US Covid regulations, or if you can read it yourself from a kosher scroll, then you should do so. If owing to Covid restrictions it is not possible, then you should listen to one of the live recitals we are broadcasting, rather than a recording.

In normal years, our communities plan their Purim schedules to ensure that every member can fulfil their obligation to hear the megillah, whether in shul or at private readings at home. We recognise that whilst some communities will be able to achieve this in a Covid-secure manner this year, for other communities and many of our members, it will not be feasible or responsible to do so. Please do not hesitate to be in touch to discuss your options.

Indoor megillah readings

Communities that are currently open (or will have reopened by Purim)

In-person megillah readings can take place inside a shul. All Covid guidelines in Section A [here](#) apply. Please see additional points below.

- Any publicity must make clear that this is a megillah reading only and not a Purim event or party. Food and drink cannot be served.
- The reading can, but does not need to, be linked to a shul service.
- Communities that have been open should apply the same capacity for megillah readings as they currently do for all services.
- It is critical to ensure that the room remains well ventilated by opening windows and/or doors.
- Attendees must book in advance and must bring their own megillot.
- If additional readings are required, it is essential that there is sufficient time between them to ensure that cleaning can take place, and for arriving and departing groups not to have the opportunity to interact.
- We recognise that attendance at shul is a personal choice. However, as is currently the case for all services, given the disproportionate risk of serious illness or mortality with increasing age, those aged over 70 should be asked not

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to attend. Over 50s should be reminded about the additional age-related risk and asked to factor that into their decisions about attendance.

- Sadly, children under 11 must not attend shul but Tribe has arranged a wonderful range of programmes to complement those run by our communities.
- It is preferable that those attending are already familiar with Covid protocols. However, we recognise that a megillah reading might attract those who do not currently attend services. As a result, the booking confirmation should include a clear summary of Covid guidance. Emphasis should be placed on the need to maintain distance, wear a mask and not to socialise.
- The megillah should be read at pace and not be drawn out, whilst at the same ensuring that everyone present is able to fulfil the mitzvah.
- There should be no shouting or blowing of instruments at Haman's name.
- Matanot L'evyonim can be collected by the exit (people should not have to touch the box)
- At the end of the reading, there must be a staggered departure from shul ensuring that people leave in households/support bubbles and do not mingle on the way home.

Communities that are closed who wish to open for megillah readings

Communities that are currently closed can open for megillah readings if they wish. However, it is important to note that opening after a period of closure brings with it increased risk as members will be out of routine, less familiar with Covid protocols and will be pleased to see and talk to friends that they have not seen for some time. In addition to the guidance set out above, please note the following points.

- Communities must, in advance of the megillah reading, brief attendees in writing on what is expected of them. Emphasis should be placed on the need to maintain distance, wear a mask and not to socialise.
- Communities must have individuals allocated to oversee Covid compliance.
- A new reduced capacity must be fixed and agreed with the US Community Division. As a guide, even in our largest shul building, capacity should not exceed 50 in one space. For comparison, in a smaller shul, capacity might be closer to 20.
- If communities choose to open for Purim only, it is advisable to prepare a note to members explaining the rationale. There may be confusion as to why it has been possible to open for Purim, but not for other occasions.

Outdoor Megillah Readings on the Shul site

Seated

- Megillah readings can be held outdoors in the shul grounds - including in an open-sided marquee - if all attendees are seated.
- Capacity should be based on the space available ensuring all seats are at least 2m apart and there is sufficient space for a walkway.
- All other guidance above applies including the points relating to over 70s and children.

- Only those from the same household or support bubble can sit together.
- Please note that all attendees must book in advance and must wear masks.
- Additional stewards will be required to ensuring that all those who attend maintain social distancing and to manage a staggered departure.
- There can be no mingling on site nor on the nearby streets.
- There must be liaison with CST ahead of the event and liaison with the local police is also advised.
- A risk assessment is required.

Drive-in on synagogue site

A drive-in megillah on site is a safer way to welcome back non-regulars than an indoor reading.

- In order to hold a drive-in megillah reading on site communities must obtain permission from their local public health director and inform both the local police and residents nearby. Please also inform the Communities Division of your plans.
- The drive-in must be for a reading only and not be a party or carnival. Food or drink cannot be served.
- Capacity should be based on the size of the car park. In order to manage the space effectively, there must be no more than 20 cars at any reading.
- There can only be one household or support bubble in each car.
- Each car should have the same window (e.g. driver's window) wound down with the others closed.
- Stewards will be required to direct cars and ensure compliance.
- Attendees should be sensitive to neighbours and avoid using horns.
- Attendees should be made aware before booking that the shul facilities, including toilets, will not be available to them during the reading.
- There must be liaison with CST ahead of the event.
- A risk assessment is required.

Megillah readings in other locations

- It is not permitted to hold megillah readings for multiple people in public spaces or on streets
- Communities might consult with their local public health teams about the option of holding small drive-in megillah readings on the sites of other communal buildings such as schools. These events cannot take place without express written permission of the local public health team and liaison with the police and CST.
- A megillah reading by a visitor for individuals or members of one household can only be read from outside the property. The reader should wear a mask and social distancing should be maintained. Members of the household must remain either in the house or on their driveway.

Mishloach Manot and deliveries to members

- Some shuls may wish to coordinate the packing and distribution of mishloach manot to or on behalf of members.

- In order to minimise risk, when packing, please keep the number of volunteers to a minimum, keep the room well ventilated and ensure that all those involved are wearing masks and maintain distancing.
- Those volunteers or staff members delivering mishloach manot should wear masks and should not engage with those receiving the items. They should deliver in the same way that Amazon currently deliver.