

# VA'AD HARABANIM RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC

PO BOX 1233 Teaneck, NJ 07666 • (844) 895-RCBC • <https://www.rcbcvaad.org>



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May 24, 2020

ר"ח סיון תש"פ

Dear Friends,

We are writing to provide guidance as to the resumption of *tefilah betzibur* in our communities. We are inspired by the support, respect and cooperation of our community throughout this challenging time. We are happy to see the continued decline in the spread of COVID in the past weeks and we pray that this will continue. On this past Thursday and Friday, the governors of NY and NJ have legalized public, socially distanced outdoor gatherings. We continue to believe that we should wait two weeks until we begin to gather in our community. This follows the guidance of the OU and RCA, who are guided by the leading poskim and doctors of our country. This is also the recommendation of the local doctors who are advising us. Therefore, the first minyanim in Bergen County are projected to be on June 4.

The above is contingent on the expectation that we will not see a rise in the prevalence of COVID between now and then. We will be closely monitoring this for the next two weeks, and beyond. If there is a rise, we will be forced to delay or cease our minyanim once again. We remain committed to the principle that safety far exceeds the obligation of communal tefila and other activities. We are only considering the resumption of the minyanim based on the assessment that they are truly safe.

The safety of these minyanim is also contingent on the strict adherence to social distancing at these minyanim. We are developing a set of guidelines that will be distributed in the coming days. These include the facts that all minyanim will be held outside, with limited numbers of people, with all participants positioned at least 6 feet apart and wearing masks. In addition, these minyanim will not be arranged informally, but will be organized through the shuls with participants registering in advance to join a consistent group. Participants will need to stay with their particular group and cannot "minyan hop" from day to day. The adherence to these principles is critical to everyone's safety, and we will not be able to continue these minyanim if they are not conducted in this way.

Our medical guidance recommends a slow and gradual phase-in of these minyanim. After the "start date", individual shuls should determine the best way to schedule minyanim that is appropriate for the conditions of each shul. Some may start with davening once a day or limit themselves to weekdays. Others may delay all minyanim for another period of time. Some will schedule one minyan for the entire shul and some will arrange many, so that everyone can participate in person. These decisions will be left to the discretion of each rav and shul.

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It is most important that no individual feel obligated to participate before feeling ready. There is a strong basis of the position that even individuals who are saying kaddish can fulfill this responsibility by listening to a minyan via Zoom and answering "amen". Additionally, those who are older or at risk for severe COVID illness such as high blood pressure, obesity, or diabetes should consult with their medical doctor prior to attending minyan.

We are overwhelmed by our community's ability - both the rabbis and the general community - to remain united through this most challenging time. We believe that this unity largely contributed to our success in getting to this point and will serve us well as we continue to grow together as a community in the years to come, with Hashem's help. We wish everyone a Chag Sameach. May it be a very happy and healthy celebration of our Torah, and may it be the last holiday that we must celebrate individually.

Sincerely,

Rabbinical Council of Bergen County