

VA'AD HARABANIM RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC

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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin
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March 19, 2020
כ"ג אדר תש"פ

Dear Friends,

We are writing with an update regarding COVID-19 and the ongoing health situation in our community. We have all been following the news of the spread of this virus with great concern. Based on our consultation with medical experts from the local area hospitals, we know that the spread of the virus is on the rise and our hospitals are nearly at capacity.

Therefore, we urge the entire community to uphold the social distances measures we adopted last week with ever greater vigilance. No one should be within six feet of anyone else, aside from the family with whom one lives. The guidelines that were set last week are reprinted below as a reminder. In addition, we would like to add a number of updates:

A. There should be no stigma attached to this disease. It is no one's fault and we are all trying our best. In addition, please realize that many, many of us might have it with mild symptoms or even no symptoms. We should not be frightened because the vast majority of people who contract this virus will be completely fine and will recover after a few days of mild symptoms. Our communal efforts are for the sake of the small minority that are having significant symptoms and who can overload our healthcare system, which in turn may imperil the health of the entire population. Thank you to everyone who is helping make our community part of the solution to this challenge.

B. If you feel mild symptoms, call your doctor. The hospital is requesting that you treat mild symptoms at home and if you go to the emergency room with symptoms that may be COVID-19, please call them ahead so that they can prepare.

C. All RCBC updates are posted on our website: www.rcbcvaad.org, including online community events and sales at our local stores.

D. As we look towards Pesach, we acknowledge that while we cannot predict precisely what the situation will be in three weeks, we must plan based on the current fact pattern, and the expected course of the spread of COVID-19. On this basis, we urge everyone to stay home with immediate family, even separated from parents and grandparents. This is a painful but necessary precaution. Similarly, we should not travel to other areas of the country, even by car, especially not to Florida where we have a very large vulnerable population.

E. We anticipate that we may have to execute both the sale of chametz as well as the siyum on Erev Pesach online. Please stay tuned to your shul's announcements for details on that as we get closer. Alternatively, for first-borns who are able, there is still time to learn a small masechet and to make a siyum at home.

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F. We have been working with the local stores and groceries in order to arrange for the sale of fully prepared boxed Pesach meals that will be able to be purchased. Please look out for more information about that if you are interested.

G. We are all inspired by the way that the community is making this challenge into an opportunity for solidarity, for mutual concern and for personal growth. It is hard to keep track of all of the amazing creative virtual programming that is taking place. We are trying to post as many of them as we can on our website. We would also like to invite the entire community to sing Yedid Nefesh from your front doors or porches, starting at exactly 7 PM on Friday night.

Guidelines of Social Distancing: Always keep six feet away from other people-try to avoid sharing an elevator with someone else, if possible. Only do essential errands and try to do them at off times.

1. All community members are strongly encouraged to work from home, if possible, and to stay home whenever possible. It is critical for adults to set the right example. If you have to go to work, minimize interactions in transit and while there.
2. As the schools are currently closed, there should not be playdates between children of different families. This would undermine the entire purpose of the school closing.
3. Shuls are closed for all minyanim and shiurim until further notice. There should be no house minyanim.
4. There should be no public celebrations for smachot.
5. People should not invite guests for Shabbat meals.
6. Shiva visits should be replaced by phone/video calls.
7. Levayot should be restricted to a small group of family members and a minyan.
8. Refrain from contact sports.
9. Restaurants should not seat customers. People should order for pick-up and delivery only.
10. The Mikvaot will remain open, at the guidance of CDC and local health authorities. Women under mandatory quarantine or who are experiencing symptoms of illness may not use the mikvah. Please consult your rav for further clarification or for specific questions.

Please take these days as a critical opportunity to intensify our prayers and concern for each other and our communities. May we join together in health and happiness in the near future.

Sincerely,
The Rabbinical Council of Bergen County