

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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Sunday, March 29, 2020
ד' ניסן, תש"פ

Dear Friends,

These last weeks have been trying for our community in many ways. For those of us fortunate enough to be healthy, the experience of isolation, quarantine, and extreme social distancing that the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated has been challenging. And yet, it is precisely this sacrifice that has spared the lives of many in our community. We once again wish to express our collective gratitude for your understanding of these restrictions and vigilant adherence to them. With Pesach approaching, we feel the need to issue an urgent and dedicated communication regarding celebration of the holiday this year.

At this point, we are all surely aware of the underlying facts. New Jersey has the second most cases of COVID-19 in the country, with more than double that of California, which has the next most cases, and Bergen County has, at the moment of this writing, double the number of cases than any other county in the state. Within Bergen County, the towns most impacted are Teaneck, Bergenfield, and Englewood.

Our hospitals simply cannot sustain additional cases. As we have heard from senior and trusted physicians from our shuls, and at all of the local hospitals, the conditions are unlike anything that has been seen in the United States of America in generations. Local hospitals may have to split ventilators, forcing critical COVID-19 patients to breathe the same air. For the physicians and nurses themselves, there is a dire shortage of personal protective equipment. Let us remember that for every additional person infected, another may not receive the limited critical resources available in our hospitals, whether they suffer from COVID-19 or any other life threatening illness. Moreover, each additional person who risks infection endangers the health care workers themselves, given the dire shortage in available personal protective equipment.

As such, it is our halakhic position that, on the basis of the expert testimony provided to us by our local physicians, we **cannot have any guests at all for Pesach this year**, even though we have been observing strict social distances for weeks. We will be having our *sedarim* and sharing Yom Tov **only with the family that lives with us in our homes**, and that is what everyone should do.

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We personally experience the heartbreak that this imposes and we empathize with the terrible burden of those who will be forced to have *sedarim* alone. We do this for the single reason powerful enough to justify such a profound halakhic and human cost: it is absolutely necessary to mitigate further spread of this terrible virus, to protect ourselves, and to avoid infecting others, who may further spread the virus.

For individuals with established and underlying psychiatric conditions whose health may be endangered by prolonged periods of isolation, or for people in other unique situations, reasonable solutions can be presented, on a case by case basis, by your family Rav, in consultation with the relevant medical professionals. Likewise, for those with family members in precarious health situations which require monitoring, please be in touch with your family Rav for specific guidance regarding communicating over YomTov.

The Talmud (Megillah 15a) teaches us that when there was a threat to the Jewish community on Pesach, Esther and Mordechai compromised the celebration of Pesach to declare the fast that was essential to the salvation of the community. It is now our obligation to follow in their footsteps for the welfare of our community, by restricting celebrating Pesach, including *sedarim*, to those who live together. We do so, not as a leniency in the sanctity of Yom Tov, nor with the slightest disregard for the halakhic significance of honoring parents, but, rather, as an expression of our strict adherence to the overriding Jewish value of the sanctity of human life.

לשנה הבאה בירושלים. May we all celebrate Pesach together, in good health, with our entire families, in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Sincerely,

The Rabbinical Council of Bergen County