

PANDEMIC ISSUES - SUMMARY
Zoom session for the Milwaukee Community with Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt
Monday – October 26, 2020
The video is available at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDpV0_8r21k&feature=youtu.be

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Bio

Rabbi Aaron E. Glatt, MD, MACP, FIDSA, FSHEA is the Associate Rabbi at the Young Israel of Woodmere. He has been giving a Daf Yomi shiur for 30 years and gives a weekly gemara be'iyun shiur, daily halacha shiurim, and many other classes including a daily on-line Dirshu Mishnah Brurah yomi shiur on OU Torah (all of first 5 volumes available online with the 6th volume in progress). An international lecturer on medical and halachic issues, Rabbi Dr. Glatt has authored two seforim through ArtScroll: *Visiting the Sick* and *Women in the Talmud*. Rabbi Dr. Glatt has been a frequent speaker and advisor regarding the pandemic for many organizations, and is the director of the Halacha and Medicine Commission for the Igud Rabbonim.

Board certified in Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, Rabbi Dr. Glatt is Chairman of Medicine and Chief of Infectious Diseases / Hospital Epidemiologist at Mount Sinai South Nassau, and a full Professor of Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. A spokesperson for the Infectious Diseases Society of America, he previously, was the President & CEO of St. Joseph Hospital; Executive Vice President at Mercy Medical Center; and Associate Dean at NY Medical College. He recently received the 2020 NY American College of Physicians Laureate Award and was named a Master of the American College of Physicians.

A graduate of Yeshiva University (class valedictorian), he received his MD from Columbia University and did an internal medicine residency/chief residency at Brookdale University Medical Center, and a fellowship in infectious diseases at SUNY Health Sciences Center (Brooklyn). The author of several hundred scientific journal articles, book chapters and presentations, he has served on editorial boards and as a reviewer for many prestigious journals, has worked on many government, hospital, medical school and public health committees, and has been frequently interviewed by print, television and on-line media.

Question: Can you comment briefly on your experiences with the pandemic

General statement: Each person's medical conditions, family situation and fears may affect the guidance below. If everyone does everything they can to mitigate the spread of illness, then life can come back almost to normal, with some restrictions. This includes businesses, schools, jobs, socialization, and religious life.

Question: Can we daven inside safely now that winter is coming to Wisconsin? What conditions, restrictions, and rules need to be observed? Is there really a big difference between being outside and inside? Are open doors/windows/fans going/air filtration helpful or necessary? How important is it for masks to have a tight fit? What if someone in the minyan has the mask over their mouth but not their nose?

DAVENING AT SHUL

Davening inside: If the number of incidences in a community is not overwhelming, davening can be done inside safely with appropriate masking, distancing, proper ventilation, and an effective policy for people to stay away if they or a household member have symptoms or have been exposed to someone with symptoms.

Comparison between mask wearing and to wearing a seat belt – there is an obligation to wear a seatbelt, they are uncomfortable and sometimes the seatbelt can cause harm but the vast majority of time it is beneficial to wear the seatbelt, heaven forbid we should never need a seatbelt.

We have so many people are terrified to come to shul. They should not be terrified.

Question: Should I attend a minyan if only a few people do not use masks at that minyan? Do masks really protect people? What about studies that show that they cause harm?

Masks: Wearing a mask is imperative when near others, except for “bubbles” described below. The preferred mask is a surgical 3 ply surgical cloth mask covering the entire mouth and nose. This will significantly reduce the likelihood of exposing someone else to the virus and, if exposed, may lower the chance of another person getting sick and the severity of a disease. All respected medical professional societies agree that masks help, although opinions vary on the extent to which masks help.

Masks are not dangerous: Wearing a mask is not dangerous, with very few exceptions.

Distancing: Distancing should be done both indoors and outdoors. People should be at least 6ft apart and, if possible, even farther apart.

Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning: Heating and air conditioning systems should be in good working order and should have appropriate up-to-date filters. Try to get the best possible ventilation and open the windows, if possible.

People with symptoms or exposure to COVID: In the era of COVID, it is assur (forbidden) to go to shul when you are sick – all poskim (authorities on Jewish law) agree. People should not come to shul if they or anyone in their household has any COVID symptoms currently or within the last week or two. A person's cough or respiratory illness could cause someone else's serious illness or death.

Shiurim: It is okay to do live shiurim (classes on Torah issues) in shul if all safety precautions are followed.

TRAVELING

Questions: Three scenarios - a. My wife and I are anxious to see our our new granddaughter in NY-so much we've missed already. Is there a way to make this trip in relative safety? Please be specific regarding mode of transportation, lodging on the road (if applicable) and in NYC, and all other considerations. We are 72 and 68. Please be forthright if such a trip is not recommended.

b. If my daughter comes from FLA to see us during the week of Thanksgiving, we will give her her own room and bathroom. Do we need to wear masks in the house when we are out of our rooms if we stay 6 ft away from each other? Is it safe for her to visit? She is 32. We are more than twice her age.

c. Now that the cold winter approaches, is it safe for grandparents to host children and grandchildren inside at a safe distance, all masked and healthy?

General comments: Although risk can be minimized, there is always some risk of being with others. Hashem allows us to take some risks and, if a person feels that the risk is too high, then the person should not travel. The decision of whether to travel should be decided on a case-by-case basis, considering each person's age, underlying medical condition and other factors; and sometimes seeking the advice of a medical expert and then deciding how much risk a person is willing to take.

Travel by plane: Travel by plane may now be a reasonable decision, although not entirely without risk. Some data suggests that plane travel may be a bit safer than travel by car, depending on circumstances. Wear a mask the entire time, try to sit as far away as possible from others on the plane and in the airport. Be as careful as possible about touching things especially in the bathroom on plane, and particularly when they are not cleaned on a regular basis. To reduce the potential high contamination, wash hands well and consider wiping down the immediate area around your seat on the plane.

Travel by car: Travel by car is generally safe, except for the normal driving risks. Stopping for gas or using the bathroom, with appropriate hand washing, is not a significant risk.

Travel by bus or train: Risks are similar to a plane, depending on how many people are seated together, how close seats are to each other and whether all the travelers are wearing masks.

Lodging: Staying at a reputable hotel, inn, or Air bnb should not have a significant risk of contagion.

Visiting multiple neighborhoods: Travel between neighborhoods is discouraged and could lead to spreading risks.

GETTING TOGETHER WITH FAMILY

Family visiting from other areas: The decision of whether to allow a family member to visit and what safety measures to use depends on specific circumstances. Factors include proper masking and distancing in the person's hometown, not coming from a high incidence location, taking proper precautions while traveling, and whether the person was exposed to COVID.

Coupling / bundling together in a bubble. If proper precautions are taken, it may be reasonable to live in the same house as a visiting family member, without masks in the house. However, depending on each family's situation, some families would be better off to avoid living together. Mixing with family members who are not always behaving safely or with children who are attending school and being exposed to others, poses a higher risk and may not be safe for all family members. It might be prudent to put a visitor in a separate basement bedroom, wear a mask when together, and stay at least six feet apart.

Visiting with in-town children and grandchildren: Each person has to decide how much risk to take, considering a variety of factors. When visiting children or grandchildren, stay outside, when feasible. Otherwise, stay apart in larger rooms and adults and older children wear masks. Any child old enough to wear a mask should wear a mask, when close to grandparents they are visiting and could remove the mask, when farther away. If children are sick, keep children away from grandparents.

Question: a. Can you explain the efficacy of the testing and the different types?
b. What is the accuracy and value of the antibody testing? c. Do you recommend any ongoing Covid testing to help keep the schools open and to avoid community spread?

COVID

COVID testing: Negative COVID test results do not rule out that a person has COVID, but a positive test is proof that the person has COVID. There are various types of COVID testing with varied amounts of usefulness. Get medical advice on which type of test to have and interpreting the results.

Question: How do I know when to get tested? What if I am feeling sick? What if I have been exposed to someone? What does being exposed mean? The CDC recently changed their standards to 15 minutes in 24 hours – can you explain that and do we need to be concerned about it? If I feel sick or have been exposed in some way – do I need to stay away from work/shul/others/my family?

COVID symptoms: A person with new COVID symptoms, particularly a fever and/or loss of smell or taste, should assume he/she has COVID and is contagious, should isolate, should not go to school, school, shopping, etc, and should see a physician, either through telehealth or in person. People with chronic symptoms, such as migraines, do not need to assume the chronic symptom is a sign of COVID. The CDC website lists COVID symptoms: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

Isolation of people testing positive: People who have tested positive for COVID should be isolated for 10 days from the onset of their symptoms. After that, if the person's fever is gone and the person's symptoms are resolving (even if still present), the person is considered to no longer be contagious.

Question: There is a lot of confusion with defining close contact when living in the same home. If a member of the households tests positive and then remains mostly confined to one room and stays distant and is masked when need to be around others, what is the amount of time the other non-positive family members need to quarantine? And when do they start counting their quarantine days? Can you explain the incubation period and what that means for what we should be doing?

Quarantine of people who were exposed to COVID: Anyone who has been exposed to a known case of COVID should quarantine for 14 days from the date of last exposure, even if they feel great. After 14 days without symptoms, the person is assumed not to have COVID.

People with antibodies: People who had COVID and have antibodies are not 100% safe from getting COVID again, although they are likely, but not certain, to have immunity for at least three months. The impact beyond three months is not known at this time.

OTHER ISSUES

Question: Is it safe to have cleaning people or workmen in your home?

Cleaning people or workmen in a home: If they and their family are not sick, cleaning people and workmen can be inside a home, but all the people should wear masks, while in the home.

Question: What do you say about the approach of the Great Barrington Declaration and getting to herd immunity? Isn't there so much damage being done to people because of the damage to the economy/missing doctor's appointments/depression/suicide/domestic abuse etc.?

Herd Immunity and the Great Barrington Declaration: It is against torah law to expose people and cull the weak to seek survival of the fittest.

Question: What is the safest and appropriate way to test in schools? -Appropriate application of

There are many different ways to approach this for a school.

The basic principles that I have outlined – masking, distancing, keeping people at home who are not well, appropriate testing, appropriate quarantining – these things will allow us to stay open.

These are the things that will allow us to get through this and stay open as much as possible.

Question: When is it projected to be OK to start "normalizing" getting back together with friends? When do you think this will all be over? Give us some good news!

You can get together with friends tonight! Just do it the right way.

I feel that I am among friends here with you in Milwaukee.

People want to do the right thing. It's not liberals vs. conservative.

I am very optimistic that there will be a vaccine. There is cautious optimism that a vaccine will be available to health care workers before the end of 2020. That is very exciting.

I believe that the concern that people have about it being politicized is not so problem – there are independent scientific boards that will be reviewing the data. So hopefully there will be a vaccine by early 2021 available to all.

We also can treat people better. We are learning more every day. 220,000 people have died – a tragic number. But I do think that there is a light at the end of the tunnel – hopefully we will see it soon with God's help!

It is good to see the achdus (unity) in the community.