



**The Rabbinical Assembly
Ontario Region**

STATEMENT IN REPOSENSE TO THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

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Dear Friends,

The Rabbinical Assembly - Ontario Region, represents the rabbis of the Conservative Movement in our community. We are making this statement as a collective, in response to the spread of the novel coronavirus in Toronto and around the world.

Our healthcare providers need our help to slow the spread of this disease before their resources are overwhelmed. While the number of cases is still low, it will rapidly increase. Even if COVID-19 patients will be treatable, we may deplete our resources and other patients who suffer from ordinary, serious illnesses will not be able to get the necessary care, putting their lives in danger.

In Judaism preserving life is of utmost importance. Slowing the spread of the disease will allow our hospitals to best manage this situation. The only way to do this is for us to take steps to socially distance ourselves from one another.

We are therefore asking the community to adopt the following policies of social distancing related to social and religious life in our community. We intend to re-evaluate these policies on an ongoing basis based on the expert guidance provided by medical leadership.

1. All those who are at increased risk of more severe outcomes should refrain from attending all large gatherings, including synagogue services. This includes Canadians who are aged 65 and over, those who have compromised immune systems, and those with underlying medical conditions.
2. With regards to smaḥot (weddings, b'nei mitzvah, brit milah and baby namings, etc.) please reconsider plans for large gatherings. As much as possible, these celebrations should be limited both in duration and in attendance. Please consult with your rabbi for direction in these matters.
3. Our synagogues have cancelled all shared meals and food service. Please do the same and have Shabbat meals with your family only.
4. Those, G-d forbid, dealing with a loss, should conduct the funeral service at the graveside, and limit attendance as much as possible. Shiva visits should be replaced by phone/video calls.

5. Visits to the elderly or the ill by clergy who serve in congregations, and by anyone at elevated risk, should be replaced by phone/video calls.

These represent significant changes to our lives, on top of the changes that have been enacted by our individual congregations. **This outline cannot guide every particular situation, and we will all have to address each circumstance as it comes up based on professional expertise and religious guidance.**

It is with a very heavy heart that we are suspending so many of the most crucial routines of our daily lives and lifecycle moments. We do this only because of the compelling nature of our circumstances and the medical advice we have received. These measures are adopted as a reflection of our overarching commitment to the sanctity of all human life, and we pray that these will be very temporary measures. With our efforts at social distancing, we also echo the words of Rabbi Yosef Kanofsky of Los Angeles: “Every hand that we don’t shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise.”

Please take these days as a critical opportunity to intensify our prayers to the Rofeh Ne’eman, the Faithful Healer, that all those ill will be healed and that our community will be shielded from any further harm.

Sincerely,

The Rabbinical Assembly, Ontario Region