



Rabbinical Council of Victoria

Religious Leadership for the Jewish Community

ועד הרבנים דויקטוריה

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Rabbinical Council of Victoria (RCV) Statement on the current COVID 19 situation

17 March 2020

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Dear Friends

This is time of great challenge and anxiety across the world. With newly reported cases of coronavirus in our Melbourne community, there are a number of guidelines with regards to shule and simcha gatherings that have been developed by the RCV, Melbourne Beth Din and Prof. George Braitberg, on behalf of The Australasian Jewish Medical Federation.

These guidelines, which have been discussed with and endorsed by the Beth Din and senior Rabbis, are presented with a heavy heart. It is, however, critical that we work together vigilantly and without compromise so that we can impede the spread of the coronavirus. It is also important to understand that as this situation rapidly changes our advice will need to change accordingly. We will continue to update these guidelines as new information comes to hand.

Guidelines:

1. Everyone must adhere to all the instructions and advice given by the DHHS and other relevant government bodies.
2. Every Shule, minyan and shtibel will be making their own decisions regarding ongoing minyanim and services. It is recommended that no service should exceed 2 hours and social distancing (at least 1.5m) between people be maintained.
3. Where services continue as normal, people should take all the necessary precautions, such as hand-washing before and after davening and sanitising surfaces and door handles as per medical guidelines issued by DHHS.
4. It is essential to maintain safe distances (around 1.5 metres) when sitting in shule.
5. No kissing or unnecessary direct touching of the Torahs or mezuzahs.
6. The elderly should not go to shule. Anyone with medical conditions, especially over the age of 65, should ask their general practitioner if it is advisable to attend. Anyone who is sick should definitely not attend services or any public space.
7. Anyone returning from overseas must go into 14-day self-quarantine as per current Government policy. Other members of their family should have no physical contact with them and can attend shule if self isolation rules have been complied with.
8. If a member of the family is tested as positive for the virus, the whole family must go into quarantine as per current Government policy.

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9. Shule kiddushim should be cancelled until further notice. Social functions should be avoided.
10. It is preferable at this time to participate in shiurim online, however, those attending Shiurim should maintain a safe distance between themselves (1.5m) and others and take all the other necessary precautions as with davening.
11. For family simchas such as a weddings and barmitzvahs, including delaying them, please consult with your rabbi or a rabbi from the RCV. As the situation evolves we anticipate this advice will change as we comply with Government guidelines on social gatherings.
12. Brit Milah should continue as normal but the celebration should comply with health and safety regulations and take into consideration all the information provided above.
13. If a simcha goes ahead it should be as small as possible, ideally limited to close family, with all the correct precautions taken.
14. Family members from overseas should not attend the simcha until their 14-day quarantine period is completed.
15. At simchas, there should be no physical contact between people even when dancing, and a safe distance should be maintained at all times. As the situation evolves we anticipate this advice will change as we comply with Government guidelines on social gatherings.
16. For those in distress, we, your rabbis are here to assist and support you. We also call on each shule to establish a shule chesed committee to provide help to those in need. This will include support for our aged and vulnerable community members who will be increasingly advised to stay at home in isolation as the number of community cases increases.

We, the rabbis of your community, stand alongside you to guide and assist during this unprecedented pandemic. The RCV is meeting online twice a week to discuss ways of drawing on our rich resources of Torah to face this crisis.

There are now many online shiurim across the community and we are looking into other ways of bringing the power of Tefillah into our homes.

Now is a time for cool heads and warm hearts and kindness. Now is a time to reassure our children and grandchildren. Now is the time to help one another in a spirit of areivut and achdut. Now is the time for Teshuva, Tefilla and Tzedakah. Now is the time to pray for humanity and all the sick and worried people across our planet.

If you have any health related concerns please contact your local doctor, the Department of Health and Human Services website at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus> or the hotline on 1800 675 398.