



סיידור



V.4

REOPENING SHULS IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

Preparedness and Prevention Guidelines

ונשמרתם מאד לנפשותיכם

WE MUST DO OUR UTMOST TO SAFEGUARD OUR LIVES AND THOSE OF OUR COMMUNITY.

While Jews throughout the world are eager to resume davening in communal settings, each community will have unique factors to consider before reopening its shuls. Throughout the gradual return to regular functionality, varying government rules and regulations at the relevant national, state, city, and locality level must be followed.

All shuls in each community should work together in a unified manner to implement the new standards in accordance with government guidelines, official health recommendations, and rabbinic approval.

Carefully review and implement these protocols now, so your shul is ready to reopen once it is permitted to do so. We must do our utmost in prevention so our shuls can remain open for the future! Please pass along this information to your relevant contact list.



PREPARING OUR COMMUNITY TODAY FOR A SAFE AND SECURE TOMORROW™

The Chesed Fund Limited is dedicated in memory of Mordechai & Rebecca Kapiloff, עי"ד. Dr. Bernard Kapiloff, עי"ד, and Rabbi Norman & Louise Gerstenfeld, עי"ד. Project Ezra of Greater Baltimore, Inc. is dedicated in memory of M. Leo Storch, עי"ד.



Dedicated in loving memory of all those who have died of Covid-19 and as a zechus refuah shleimah for those suffering from Covid-19.



GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Davening outside is a safer choice than within a shul building given the health risks associated with gatherings in enclosed spaces, even at only 25–50% occupancy.
- Establish a team of medical professionals, rabbis, and community lay leaders, from whom to seek advice when safety and health issues arise. Review all decisions with the shul board.
- Carefully monitor all local regulations and guidelines so the shul can respond promptly to any changes.
- Regardless of the number of people legally permitted to gather (assuming more than ten are allowed), consider limiting minyanim to only a few more than ten. Enforce the limit.
- Consider a reservation/appointment-style system where congregants sign up to attend specific minyanim.
- Schedule davening to leave ample time between minyanim and thereby reduce congregating among congregants.
- If there are multiple concurrent minyanim, stagger their starting times to reduce congregating.
- Recommend that congregants keep regular davening schedules so they convene with the same group of people for the same minyanim.
- Assign seating for each congregant as done for Yomim Tovim.
- The shul rabbi should consider which tefillos can be shortened or said rather than sung. Minimize speeches.



CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

- Have the shul building cleaned and thoroughly disinfected before reopening.
- Test the HVAC system to ensure functionality and install new filters.
- Test alarm and video surveillance systems, Shabbos clocks, timers, AED equipment, and emergency alert systems (911/Hatzalah/Shomrim phones).
- Ensure all bathrooms and sinks are functioning and equipped with soap and paper towels.
- Protect *sifrei Torah* by ensuring wipes and cleaning supplies are not in contact with them, since they could damage the parchment or ink.
- Set up a daily cleaning schedule that includes frequent and thorough cleaning and disinfecting.
- Create a detailed schedule listing of all areas the cleaning staff must clean (restrooms, railings, doorknobs, locks, combination locks, etc.) and frequency of cleaning, plus a daily checklist for them to sign off on.
- Cleaning staff must wear mask and gloves and should only come to work if they are in good health. Consider offering paid sick leave to ensure compliance.
- Cleaning staff should sanitize hard and frequently touched surfaces, if possible, frequently throughout the day.
- Keep sanitizing wipes in all restrooms for congregants to disinfect doorknobs, sink handles, and toilet seats between uses.
- Situate the shul security guard (if applicable) at the entrance of the shul at the start of each minyan to confirm that people entering with masks are actually congregants.
- Contact the local police department to inform them of the shul reopening date.
- Contact the shul's insurance company to inform them of the shul reopening date in case there are any new requirements.



SOCIAL DISTANCING

- It is better to err on the side of caution and keep a social distance measure of 8 feet rather than the recommended 6 feet.
- Consider opening areas that are not normally used for davening, such as a social hall, to enable social distancing.
- Set up all tables and chairs in a layout that allows for social distancing. Consider removing furniture as needed, taping/markings those that should not be used, or introducing other physical barriers.
- Remove extra tables or other surfaces that are used for short-term storage (e.g., tables in hallways) to make spaces less crowded.
- Develop a layout for davening in accordance with social distancing guidelines (6–8 feet between daveners in any direction). Mark floors with tape to create squares for each congregant to remain in while davening, providing them sufficient space to move around. Include extra space between rows for people to be able to walk by each other while staying 6–8 feet apart.
- The new davening layout should not block emergency exits and include special accommodations for congregants who are disabled or need extra assistance.
- Close off playground areas with clearly visible barriers, but instruct cleaning staff to clean and disinfect the area occasionally anyway, as children may still play there.



SECURITY

- Review and reinstate all security policies and procedures.
- Review any new policies and schedules with your security company.
- Weigh the value of new health-related policies against possible jeopardy to the shul's security policies (e.g., leaving entrance doors open so less people are having contact with doors, or using a back door as a new exit to help reduce number of people leaving at once, or leaving windows open for better air flow).



SUPPLIES

- Keep a stock of basic medical supplies in the shul that are easily accessible even on Shabbos.
- Keep a large stock of industrial cleaning supplies, including disinfecting wipes. Purchase wipes that are not attached to each other so they can be used on Shabbos, if permitted by the shul's rabbi.
- Keep a large stock of toilet paper, tissues, paper towels, trash bags, hand soap, hand sanitizer, masks, and gloves in a secured location.
- Keep disposable masks and gloves outside of the shul's main entrance for anyone who forgets to bring them from home.
- Keep a large supply of hand soap and paper towels available in all restrooms and at all washing stations. Do not use cloth towels.
- Replace hand washing cups with disposable cups, if permitted by the rabbi.
- Install automatic (no-touch) hand sanitizers throughout the shul, with signs indicating they should not be used on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Keep regular hand sanitizers available for those days instead.
- Use disposable adhesive plastic film (as used on supermarket credit card machines) on door handles and combination locks and replace film frequently.
- Consider replacing trash cans that are opened by hand with foot-operated cans.
- To discourage congregants from making kiddush and socializing, do not keep any food, grape juice, or wine in the shul. (Do keep bottled water on hand.)
- Close access to areas that will not be used for davening, such as a break room, kitchen, library, etc.



COMMUNICATION

- Inform staff of all new policies and procedures and the need to enforce them.
- Request that congregants provide you with updated contact information to inform them of any updates or changes.
- Inform congregants that all new policies are mandatory and potentially life-saving. Ensure new policies are included in weekly shul bulletins. Update those congregants without email or internet access via regular mail, robocalls, or signs posted on shul entrances.
- Advise congregants that even with the implementation of the shul's new safety measures, there is still a likelihood of recurrence of Covid-19, and that medical professionals are especially concerned about a recurrence in the fall.
- Advise congregants not to attend shul if they have any symptoms of Covid-19, or have been exposed to someone with Covid-19 until they have received permission from their health professional.
- Consider asking congregants to confirm in writing that they are under 60 and are not immunocompromised, and will not attend shul if experiencing any symptoms of Covid-19.
- The shul rabbi should speak with congregants over the age of 60 to determine whether it is in the best interest of their health to attend

shul. Consider reserving a space for this age group that is more secluded space or allows for greater social distancing.

- Remind all congregants to daven at home if experiencing any symptoms of illness, even if they are in doubt as to whether they are Covid-19-related.
- Set up Zoom meetings for all weekday minyanim, if possible, so older and immunocompromised congregants can participate.
- Develop a WhatsApp group for congregants to update them on minyan details (e.g., weather cancellation, minyan time changes).
- Ask congregants to consider putting on *tallis* and *tefillin* at home.
- Inform congregants as to which *tefillos* they should daven at home to reduce the time in shul and allow for more minyanim (e.g., *Pesukei Dzimra*, start with *Borchu*).
- Remind congregants of the health risks associated with large gatherings. They should not make *kiddushim* in their homes after shul, and they should follow all local and rabbinic guidelines, so as not to jeopardize the entire shul's and community's health.
- Acknowledge the efforts of delivery and mail carriers, garbage collectors, and cleaning staff by thanking them continually during these difficult times.



HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Request that all congregants immediately report to the shul and to their own minyanim if they know or suspect that they have become infected with Covid-19 or have been, or may have been, exposed to someone with Covid-19. Congregants should not attend shul while waiting for Covid-19 results.

- Designate one congregant of each minyan to ensure only the allowed number of people are entering the shul.
- Ensure that people are maintaining social distance measures when entering and exiting the shul. At each shift of minyanim, have personable congregants with excellent communication skills and good judgment be on alert and discreetly remind people of social distancing rules. They should also quietly approach any congregant displaying any of the symptoms associated with Covid-19 and request he leave the shul immediately. They should follow up with the sick congregant a day later.
- Inform congregants whom to notify of any breaks in protocol, including social distancing violations or anyone in shul displaying symptoms or not wearing a mask.
- Develop strict policies for visitors from other cities and *meshulachim* to follow if they attend the shul.
- Limit attendance to anyone who is a *chiyuv*. Children under bar mitzvah age should not attend.
- Allow only the *baal koreh* to handle the *sifrei Torah* (removing and returning them from the *aron*, rolling them up, etc.) and other similar objects, such as the *yad*.
- The *baal koreh* should prepare the *sefer Torah* and roll it to the correct parsha before davening begins.
- Implement social distancing protocols for *aliyos*. Consult the rabbi about the possibility of having the *baal koreh* receive all *aliyos*.

- Advise congregants not to touch or kiss *mezuzahs* or *sifrei Torah*.
- Place a large plate in an easily accessible location for *tzedakah* (rather than a *pushka* that is touched by many hands) and ensure that the money is collected with gloves after *minyanim* have ended for that time period.
- Advise congregants not to make *kiddush* in shul and not to bring grape juice or wine into the shul for that purpose.
- Inform congregants that they should bring their own *siddurim* and *chumashim* from home each time they come to shul. If there is no *eruv* on *Shabbos*, allow congregants to leave them in shul in designated areas.
- Advise congregants that they may not congregate on shul grounds, in front of the shul, or on the playground.
- Prohibit learning, meeting, or any other form of congregating in the shul without exclusive permission from the rabbi.
- Shul or staff congregants who lock and unlock shul doors should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer every time they do so.
- Assign a single staff member, if possible, to handle mail and deliveries. Packages should be wiped down with disinfectant while wearing gloves.
- Leave inside doors open (where applicable) to minimize touching them.

Please note, that all the above recommendations are subject to change for various reasons as well as the uncertain health consequences of allowing gatherings to convene.

IF YOU PLAN TO HAVE OUTDOOR MINYANIM, TAKE THESE STEPS:

- Regardless of the number of people legally permitted to gather (assuming more than ten are allowed), consider limiting *minyanim* to only a few more than ten. Limit attendance to anyone who is a *chiyuv*. Children under *bar mitzvah* age should not attend.
- Establish a reservation/appointment-style system that requires the same congregants to attend the same *minyanim*.
- Congregants must maintain social distancing of 6–8 feet (mark a space for each congregant) and wear masks.
- Congregants must not attend the *minyan* if they are experiencing any symptoms.
- Congregants over 60, who have health issues, or have had *Covid-19*, should consult with their doctor and rabbi before attending the *minyan*.
- Establish screening protocols for congregants visiting from out of town.
- Assign a *gabbai* to be in charge at each *minyan*.
- Observe relevant security precautions.
- Request that congregants bring their own *siddurim* and chairs to the *minyan*, and use the restroom at home so that there is no need to enter the shul.
- Develop a parking and driving layout that protects congregants from vehicles, includes a clear direct path out of the lot in the event of an emergency, and does not block any vehicle or pedestrian traffic.
- Be careful not to bother neighbors. If there are objections, move to another location.
- Check weather reports to ensure it will not begin to rain during a *minyan*.
- Do not allow food and drinks to be brought to the *minyan*.
- Keep hand sanitizer and trash cans available.
- Remind everyone to turn off cell phones.
- Do not allow congregants to socialize at the *minyan*.

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Post these critical rules on entrance doors:

- ➔ Masks must always be worn when in shul.
- ➔ Anyone experiencing symptoms of *Covid-19* or exposed to others with symptoms within the last two weeks is strictly forbidden from entering the building or being on the premises. Include a list of known *Covid-19* symptoms.

Post reminders with the critical policies and procedures in all relevant languages throughout the shul:

- ➔ Anyone experiencing symptoms of *Covid-19* should leave shul immediately.
- ➔ Wear face masks, wash hands with soap, and use hand sanitizer often, and maintain social distancing. Include signs illustrating the proper use and disposal of masks.
- ➔ Socializing in the shul is not allowed.
- ➔ List the measures being taken to ensure everyone's safety.
- Post instructions in all restrooms for proper hand washing, with a reminder not to flush wipes or other items.
- Post "Entry Prohibited" signs on rooms that have been closed to congregants.
- Post signs with the time and location (room or floor) of each *minyan*, if once permitted, the shul has multiple *minyanim* in the building.

Special thanks to:



**DMAC Security,
David Weingot**