

This document has been amended to reflect changes in the OKC health protocols during the global Covid-19 pandemic and consistent with Phase II requirements in Montgomery County, Maryland. Changes are highlighted in green.

It has additionally been modified to address having a modified Hoshanot on Sukkot Day 2 morning and modified Torah reading and modified Hakafot outside jointly with the Parking Lot Minyan)

Ohr Kodesh has resumed communal prayer in a manner that is compliant with current guidance from the State of Maryland and Montgomery County. This document describes how Ohr Kodesh is implementing communal prayer in our building. We expect these protocols will evolve over time in response to changing circumstances at the local, state, and federal levels. Among the benchmarks that will be monitored on an ongoing basis are the number of COVID-19 cases in Montgomery County. It is possible that restrictions on communal prayer may need to be re-implemented if there is evidence that COVID-19 cases begin to rise again in our area.

It is important to emphasize that until now, Ohr Kodesh has never needed to implement infection control policies in the context of communal prayer. This is an unpleasant, but necessary task to ensure the safety of our community. It requires careful consideration of the shul's mission to provide for individuals' spiritual needs through active participation in communal prayer as well as a potentially competing need to protect the health and well-being of our community during the same communal prayer gatherings. It is in this context that the infection control measures described in this document reflect a significant departure from our historical norms. We therefore expect that it will take time for our community to become accustomed to the new measures. We welcome constructive feedback as we navigate this unfamiliar landscape together.

Statement of Purpose

This document provides recommendations to the Ohr Kodesh shul community concerning protocols that should be followed as the shul is open for limited in-person minyanim under "Phase II" guidelines in Montgomery County. At minimum, Ohr Kodesh is obligated to follow all COVID-19 related guidance that applies to religious organizations in Montgomery County, Maryland. Ohr Kodesh may wish to place additional restrictions on gatherings beyond those that are required by Montgomery County. It is expected that this guidance document will be updated frequently in response to evolving guidance from local, state, and federal officials.

Current Context

The fundamentals of COVID-19 spread have remained largely unchanged throughout the pandemic. As summarized by the State of Maryland, "COVID-19 spreads:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet)
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks

- These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs
- Some people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to COVID-19.”¹ [emphasis added]

However, because surfaces can become contaminated by infected droplets or by being touched by an infected person, infection can also be transmitted by touching infected surfaces.

Nonetheless, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has emphasized that person-to-person spread is the leading way that the virus spreads:

“The primary and most important mode of transmission for COVID-19 is through close contact from person-to-person. Based on data from lab studies on COVID-19 and what we know about similar respiratory diseases, it may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this isn’t thought to be the main way the virus spreads.”²

On June 19, 2020, the Office of the County Executive released Montgomery County Executive Order 082-20.³ This Executive Order, commonly known as the “Phase II” guidelines, provides *general guidance* on the second stage of a multi-stage approach to “open up” Montgomery County. The 9-page document does not indicate how organizations should implement the guidance that is provided in the Executive Order. It simply provides a set of guideposts that various organizations must follow during this phase of re-opening. Sections 3 and 18 of the Phase II guidance document apply to how Ohr Kodesh can conduct services onsite in the Ohr Kodesh building. The following requirements are among those included in the guidance document:

- **A minimum of six** feet of social distancing
- **Masks for persons age 2 and older, worn over both mouth and nose**
- Employee training on CDC guidelines
- Use of CDC/EPA disinfectants
- Hourly hand washing for employees
- Occupancy by one participant or one household group per 200 square feet of religious ceremony space.

Contact Tracing Capability

The State of Maryland has established “covidLINK,” the state’s contact tracing initiative.⁴ In a pandemic setting, contact tracing is an essential part of breaking the chain of infection. Contact tracing is relevant to Ohr Kodesh communal prayer to the extent that keeping track of persons who pray together at Ohr Kodesh may assist in the process of contact tracing should that information be needed.

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Ohr Kodesh will maintain lists of persons who use the building or grounds for the purpose of communal prayer. These lists—including names and contact information—will be made available to appropriate authorities if this information is needed for the purpose of contract tracing.

Individuals' Responsibilities to Each Other

Persons who enter the Ohr Kodesh building or use Ohr Kodesh grounds to participate in communal prayer are expected not only to comply with the protocols that are set forth in this document, but they are also obligated to speak up/point out when other congregants are not in compliance. *The success of these safety protocols is predicated on individual and communal responsibility.*

Definition of Religious Ceremony Space

This document pertains only to gatherings that take place in the main sanctuary + chapel space of Ohr Kodesh for the purpose of communal prayer.

Maximum Size of Gatherings

A maximum of one adult or household per 200 square feet of religious ceremony space (sanctuary + chapel) is permitted. Adults are defined as females age 12 and older and males age 13 and older. The following minyan sizes have been established for the short term:

With the wall open between the sanctuary and the chapel, including for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Holidays (Sukkot, Sh'mini Atzeret, Simchat Torah) and B'nei Mitzvah events, the total is **25 households** (adding the additional chapel space to the larger sanctuary space).

These counts include Rabbi Fishman and Cantor Labovitz should one or both be present in the sanctuary for communal prayer.

It is understood that maintenance staff, Community Security Service (CSS) volunteers and/or small numbers of other individuals may be in or around the Ohr Kodesh building at the time communal prayer is occurring. Given (1) the large size of the Ohr Kodesh building and (2) the important roles that maintenance staff and security play in ensuring smooth operations and safety, we interpret the limit of one person or household per 200 square feet to mean those individuals who are inside the sanctuary + chapel space for communal prayer. Persons who are not among the specified individuals who are engaged in communal prayer in the sanctuary may not enter that room during communal prayer.

Protocol Prior to Entering the Ohr Kodesh Building for Communal Prayer

- All persons must take their temperature at home within one hour before arriving at Ohr Kodesh for communal prayer. Oral temperature must be no higher than 100.3 degrees.

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- Use of a mercury thermometer is preferred.
- Questions concerning use of automated thermometers should be directed to Rabbi Fishman.
- All persons entering Ohr Kodesh must wear a face mask at the point of entry and keep the mask on **over their nose and mouth** at all times while in the building.
- Masks with one-way “valves” that facilitate exhalation are not permitted.

Protocol Upon Entering the Ohr Kodesh Building for Communal Prayer

- Only those persons who are listed/assigned for a specific minyan will be permitted to enter the Ohr Kodesh building for that minyan.
- All persons who enter the Ohr Kodesh building for communal prayer must do so through one set of doors.
- All persons entering the building for communal prayer must have their temperature taken by the Minyan Captain (see below) or a designee.
- Upon entering the building for communal prayer, all persons must proceed directly **to a designated restroom (see below)** and wash their hands with soap and water in a manner that is consistent with CDC guidance on effective handwashing.⁵
 - In community settings, effective hand washing is superior to use of hand sanitizer.⁶ If hand washing is not possible (read: Not *possible*, not *undesired*), an alcohol-based hand sanitizer of >=60% alcohol must be used immediately outside the front doors of the building, and prior to opening the doors to enter the building.
 - Given ready access to soap and running water, it is anticipated that all persons who enter the Ohr Kodesh building for the purpose of engaging in communal prayer will proceed directly to the restrooms to wash their hands in a manner that is consistent with CDC guidance on effective handwashing.
- Upon completion of handwashing, all persons must proceed directly to the sanctuary and take their pre-assigned seat.

Restroom Usage During Communal Prayer

Persons (excluding clergy) who are in the Ohr Kodesh building to engage in communal prayer may only use designated restrooms of the building. Congregants must ensure that only one person uses the rest room at a time. Hands must be washed before leaving the restroom.

Designated Restrooms are as follows:

For Shabbat:

- Main Sanctuary Services – can use the Men’s and Women’s restrooms in the administrative hallway; and/or the Men’s and Women’s restrooms behind the Sanctuary
- “Back Patio” Services – use the Men’s and Women’s rest Room on the lower level, in the Foyer outside of the Social Hall

For Fall Jewish Holidays

- Main Sanctuary Services – use **ONLY** the Men’s and Women’s restrooms **behind the Sanctuary**
- “Back Patio” Services – use **ONLY** the Men’s and Women’s restroom **on the lower level, in the Foyer outside of the Social Hall**
- “Parking Lot” services – use **ONLY** the Men’s and Women’s restrooms **on the lower level, near the ECC classrooms**
- Note: For the High Holidays, the restrooms on the administrative level are designated for use by OKC staff, police and security personnel, and other support persons

Main Sanctuary Minyan attendees who come to the modified Hoshanot / Hakafot in the Parking Lot after the Main Sanctuary Minyan services should continue to use only the designated bathrooms assigned to the Main Sanctuary Minyan attendees (even though they may be farther away and less convenient).

Minyan Captain

A Shabbat/Holiday Minyan Captain will be identified from among non-clergy Shabbat/Holiday minyan attendees. The Minyan Captain will have several responsibilities:

- Ensure that congregants who arrive at the building on Shabbat/Holiday are among persons who have been assigned to that minyan.
- Take congregants’ temperatures as they enter the building.
 - Deny entrance to persons with temperatures of 100.4 degrees or higher.
- Direct congregants to the designated restrooms for hand washing once an acceptable temperature is taken.
- Ensure congregants are aware of their seat assignments; direct congregants to a seating list if they do not know their assigned seat.
- Be familiar with infection control protocols and help to ensure compliance throughout Shabbat/Holiday services, **including proper mask wearing at all times.**
- Direct congregants to the building exit immediately upon completion of services.
- **For Sukkot Day 2 morning and Simchat Torah morning services where Main Sanctuary Minyan attendees may come to the Parking Lot immediately after services for modified Hoshanot / Hakafot, the Main Sanctuary Minyan Captain will continue to ensure that health protocols are followed.**

Restrictions While in the Ohr Kodesh Building for Communal Prayer

- **Entrance and Exit** - Persons who enter the sanctuary for the purpose of communal prayer may only use the designated door for entrance and exit from the room (except in the event of emergency).

- **Social Distance** - Persons who enter the Ohr Kodesh building for the purpose of engaging in communal prayer must remain at least six feet away from other persons at all times. This includes no handshaking and other direct-contact greetings.
- **Bathrooms** - Persons who enter the Ohr Kodesh building for the purpose of engaging in communal prayer may only use the bathrooms designated for the specific service.
- **Coatroom** - Only one person at a time is permitted in the coatroom. People can choose to hang their coats on the coat rack outside the Chapel or take their coats in the Main Sanctuary and place on the seat next to where they are sitting.
- **Elevators** – If people need to use the Shabbat/Holiday elevator to reach the sanctuary from the lobby level, only one person may use the elevator at a time. Attendees who reside in the same household may use the elevator together.
- **Physical Contact with Ritual Items** - Kissing of the Torah, prayer books, or mezuzot is not permitted.
- **Restricted Areas** - All persons (excluding clergy) who are in the Ohr Kodesh building for the purpose of communal prayer must remain on the upper floor of the building at all times.
 - Water fountains may not be used anywhere in the building.
 - Individual bottles of water will be placed in the back of the sanctuary for persons who need access to drinking water.
 - Persons who enter the Ohr Kodesh building for the purpose of engaging in communal prayer may not enter the administrative offices, lounges, or any closed spaces other than the sanctuary, specifically designated restrooms, and coatroom.
- **After Services** - Persons who enter the Ohr Kodesh building for the purpose of engaging in communal prayer should exit the building immediately following services (or after the modified Hoshanot / Hakafot) while maintaining an appropriate distance from one another.

High-Risk Groups that are Strongly Discouraged from Attending Communal Prayer at the Current Time

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified groups that are at high risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19.⁷ These groups include:

- Adults age 65 and above
- People who live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities
- People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well-controlled
 - Chronic lung disease
 - Asthma
 - Immunocompromised conditions (e.g. cancer, organ transplant recipients, poorly controlled HIV/AIDS, prolonged use of corticosteroids, etc.)
 - Severe obesity (body mass index of 40 or higher)

- Diabetes
- Kidney disease who need dialysis
- Liver disease
- Serious heart conditions

Persons with one or more of these risk enhancing characteristics are strongly discouraged from participating in communal prayer at this time. Persons with one or more of these risk factors who desire to attend Shabbat/**Holiday** services may do so; however, *it is expected that these individuals will consult with their physicians prior to attending services.*

Communication of Individual Responsibility

OKC should:

- Distribute this protocol document to persons who are selected to attend Shabbat/**Holiday** services as a means of communicating expectations and other information.

For persons who have one or more of the risk-enhancing characteristics above (as ascertained by the congregational survey that was distributed on June 12, 2020), and who express interest in attending Shabbat/**Holiday** services:

- Distribute a document indicating that Ohr Kodesh expects high risk persons to consult with their physicians before attending services.

Groups that are Prohibited from Attending Communal Prayer at the Current Time

Persons with the following characteristics are prohibited from participation in communal prayer at this time:

- Any respiratory symptoms
 - Cough
 - Sneezing
 - Wheeze
 - Shortness of breath
- Temperature equal to or greater than 100.4°F ⁸
- Household member attending shul with person with fever of equal to or greater than 100.4°F
- Sudden loss of taste and/or smell
- Sharing household with someone who:
 - Has active, confirmed COVID-19 infection
 - Has any respiratory symptoms
 - Has fever
 - Is recovering from COVID-19 infection (is less than 2 weeks from active illness)
- History of COVID-19 infection; less than 2 weeks post-recovery
- Persons who have traveled outside the DMV metro area in the last 14 days.

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- Persons who believe they have been in recent contact with someone who has COVID-19
 - This does not include medical personnel who maintain PPE and otherwise follow CDC guidelines for medical professionals.

Logistics in Sanctuary During Prayer

Seating in the Sanctuary

- When leading services, clergy will remain on opposite sides of the bimah, or they will utilize different lecterns on a routine basis.
- Two “sanctuary seating patterns” will be defined.
 - Each pattern will assume eight congregants in the seating area.
 - Each pattern will define specific seats in the sanctuary that are 8 feet or more from each other
 - Each of the seating patterns will be used in rotation such that two weeks will pass before the same seat (or same general area) is used again. **Extra cleaning will be performed during fall holiday season.**
- Upon entering the Sanctuary, attendees will sit only in the locations identified by the seating signs. Attendees must not switch seats.
- Members of the same household who attend services together may be seated together.

Prayer Books, Chumashim, and Machzorim

- Clergy will identify and utilize the same prayer books each week, and these books should be kept in their offices when not in use for communal prayer.
- Persons who engage in communal prayer at Ohr Kodesh may only use/handle the prayer books that are at their seats.
- At the conclusion of services, attendees must bring all prayer books they used/handled to the back of the sanctuary and place them in the designated location.

Singing

- Congregants are permitted to sing during communal prayer.
- Masks are to be worn at all times.

Duration of Services

- There is no specific limit on the duration of communal prayer.
- Common sense dictates that shorter services are associated with lower risk of viral exposure for persons who attend services.

Handling of Ritual Items During Services

- **Torah:** **At this time, the Torah scrolls will not be removed from the Ark with the exception of Simchat Torah and B’nei Mitzvah events. Please see below for specific**

information related to Simchat Torah and please see the B'nei Mitzvah Health Protocol document for B'nei Mitzvah events.

- **Yad:** Congregants who are assigned to read Torah will do so from the Chumash or machzor. They must either bring their own yad or a similar instrument for reading, or not use one.
- **Lecterns:** Rabbi Fishman will use the lectern on the right side of the bimah. The Cantor will use the lectern in the center of the sanctuary. Readers will use the lectern on the left side of the bimah. Readers and service leaders will use hand sanitizer upon coming to the lecterns and bimah and upon completion.
- **Mezuzot:** Congregants are prohibited from touching mezuzot on any door frame in the Ohr Kodesh building.
- On Simchat Torah morning, the following will occur:
 - Three individuals attending the Simchat Torah morning Main Sanctuary Minyan will be identified in advance who will be the only individuals who will be permitted to touch the scrolls. One of those individuals will also have the responsibility to open and close the ark doors. Each of the three individuals will be assigned to a specific Torah. Each of the three individuals will carry their specific scrolls, unwrap the Torah covering, recite Aliyah blessings, read from the Torah, re-cover the Torah, be the only ones to hold the Torah during modified Hakafot, and return to the Torah to its designated location in the ark.
 - Torah reading will take place at the Shulchan on the bimah.
 - Only Cantor Labovitz or her designee may roll the Torah scrolls.
 - Before and after each of the three scrolls are read, all wooden and metal surfaces will be wiped down with disinfecting wipes.
 - The handles of arks that are touched when removing and replacing the scrolls will be wiped with sanitizing wipes after each use.
 - There will be no Hakafot in the Main Sanctuary service. At the conclusion of the Main Sanctuary Minyan, those attendees who are interested may proceed out the main entrance doors to the Parking Lot area to participate in a modified Hakafot with the Parking Lot Minyan (see Parking Lot Minyan Health Protocols document). Main Sanctuary attendees who proceed to the Parking Lot must maintain 6+ feet distance from all others at all times. The near half of the Parking Lot will be designated for Main Sanctuary attendees' participation.
 - Modified Hakafot outside in the Parking Lot will not involve communal circle dancing. The scrolls will remain in one place and attendees will remain in their places. Singing is permitted at normal prayer level (not high intensity).
- On Sukkot Day 2 Morning service, a modified Hoshanot will take place in the Parking Lot with the same health protocol requirements as for Simchat Torah morning modified Hakafot with the exception that there will not be scrolls used for the Sukkot Day 2 morning Hoshanot.

High-Traffic Surfaces

Several shared surfaces will have *relatively* high traffic during communal prayer:

- Interior/exterior door handles at building entrance
- Interior/exterior restroom stall doors
- Bathroom stall doors
- Bathroom faucets
- Paper towel dispensers
- Interior/exterior door handles at sanctuary entrance
- Lobby and sanctuary banisters

Persons who engage in communal prayer at Ohr Kodesh are strongly encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water after coming into contact with these surfaces.

Cleaning Protocols for Communal Prayer

- All door handles (see list above), banisters, and lecterns must be wiped down with an EPA-approved disinfectant⁹ immediately before and after communal prayer.
- A large volume, pump-style hand sanitizer that is suitable for use in the sanctuary on Shabbat/Holiday should be placed immediately in front of the bimah at the bottom of the stairs.
 - Persons who read from the bimah during Shabbat/Holiday services must use hand sanitizer before going up the stairs.
- The hard/wooden surface of the eight seats that will be occupied for a given service, as well as two seats to the left, right, back, and front of those eight seats, must be wiped down with an EPA-approved disinfectant immediately after services are concluded.
- Extra containers of hand sanitizer and antimicrobial wipes should be kept under the lecterns.
- Bathroom doors, stall doors, faucets, and paper towel dispensers will be wiped down immediately before and after Shabbat/Holiday services.

Ventilation

- The shul's ventilation system will be turned on no later than 45 minutes prior to the start of Shabbat/Holiday services.
- The doors between the sanctuary and lobby will remain open during services.
- The doors separating the sanctuary from the chapel space will remain open during services.

¹ Maryland Department of Health. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak. Available at: <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/>. Accessed June 8, 2020.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC updates COVID-19 transmission webpage to clarify information about types of spread. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0522-cdc-updates-covid-transmission.html>. Accessed June 9, 2020.

³ Montgomery County Executive Order 070-20. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/Resources/Files/orders/082-20.pdf>. Accessed June 24, 2020.

⁴ State of Maryland. CovidLINK. Respond. Connect. Recover. Available at: <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/contact-tracing>. Accessed June 8, 2020.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Show Me the Science – How to Wash Your Hands. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-handwashing.html>. Accessed June 8, 2020.

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Show Me the Science – When and How to Use Hand Sanitizer in Community Settings. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-hand-sanitizer.html>. Accessed June 8, 2020.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>. Accessed June 8, 2020.

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Check and Record Every Day. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/COVID-19_CAREKit_ENG.pdf. Accessed June 9, 2020.

⁹ Environmental Protection Agency. List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). Available at: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>. Accessed June 9, 2020.