

March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020



As the world deals with the difficult challenges presented by COVID – 19 (Coronavirus), we, rabbis of Toronto's Jewish community, have taken guidance from medical experts and Toronto Public Health and have developed a strategy to navigate the current situation that is in the best interest of our community. Unfortunately, we now know that COVID – 19 has spread in the Jewish community. It was likely spread unwittingly over Purim. Some people with the virus have begun to experience symptoms, but there are also many other people who are currently infected by the virus even though they are not yet symptomatic. As a result we must take drastic action immediately. These are very difficult times. And we must take painful actions now for the long term benefit and wellbeing of our community. The more vigilant we are now, the better off we all will be in the future.

Medical experts who are dealing with COVID - 19 on the front lines are urging us all to remain at home with our families immediately. Alone. **This includes but is not limited to the closure of shuls and schools and the cessation of *simchas* beyond immediate family.**

Rabbi Shlomo Miller *shlita* as well as the rabbis listed below have ruled that those who follow the overwhelming advice of medical professionals **do not have a *chiyuv* to participate in a *minyan* or any other communal obligation that would necessitate gathering together.** People should *daven* and learn at home.

One final important message which goes out to our precious children and adults alike. The coming weeks and months ahead are not to be seen as a "vacation" from Torah and *mitzvos*, *chas veshalom*. On the contrary, now is a time for the Jewish people to strengthen our *tefilah* and Torah observance. The world relies on our spiritual service and in its merit may *Hashem* grant the world His Divine mercy during these difficult times.

Guidance for Community Institutions:

1. At this time, if leaders of institutions wish to proceed with vital religious services, they should be limited in number to accommodate social distancing of two meters between each participant. Should Toronto Public Health issue an order stopping these activities they must cease immediately. Please note that home *minyanim* must not take place as they usually operate in close quarters and were found in other cities to increase the spread of the virus.
2. Toronto Public Health has advised for all schools to close at this time, but they are not yet mandating it. Some schools may have consulted with their *Poskim* who have advised that they remain open. Should Toronto Public Health issue an order that all private schools must close, all Jewish schools must comply.
3. Women's *mikvaos* will remain open. Women should make all of their preparations at home. Women under mandatory quarantine or who are experiencing symptoms of illness may not use the *mikvah*. They should consult with their rabbi for further clarification; Men's *mikvaos* should not be used for regular use.

Guidance for Individuals:

1. Our medical experts advise that the following people are at increased risk of transmitting COVID-19, and as such, we recommend that any of the following people should please learn and *daven* at home and refrain from attending any group gatherings:
  - a. Anyone with fever or cough or sore throat or muscle aches or other flu-like symptoms.
  - b. Anyone who has been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID – 19 or someone with fever or other flu-like symptoms.
  - c. Anyone who has returned from outside the country in the past 2 weeks.
2. Our medical experts advise that people with compromised immune systems, chronic illness and those approximately 65 years of age and over are at increased risk of severe complications from COVID-19, and as such, we recommend that these individuals:
  - a. should not attend *shul* or public gatherings and should *daven* and learn at home.
  - b. should avoid any physical contact such as handshaking, hugging or kissing with all, including for example showing affection to one's grandchildren.
3. We should cease kissing *mezuzos*, *siddurim*, *sifrei Torah* and the like.
4. Community members are encouraged to work from home and stay at home whenever possible.
5. All non-essential travel should be cancelled to inhibit the spread of the virus into the community.
6. Medical experts advise that while school is closed, there should be no play dates between children of different families.
7. We must all practice robust hand hygiene which includes regular hand washing with soap and water or use effective alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
8. We must endeavour to disinfect all frequently touched surfaces regularly, especially those that are frequented by multiple members of the community on a regular basis.

Restaurants and Groceries:

1. We recommend that customers only patronize restaurants via ordering pick up or delivery. Please support these establishments with your business at this difficult time.
2. Food distributors have advised us that there is enough food in the city for Pesach. This assumes however, that individuals are not over-purchasing or "hoarding." Please be conscious of your fellow community members when shopping and only purchase that which your family regularly requires.

**COR's Executive Rabbinical Vaad:**

Rabbi Yacov Felder, Chairman, Rabbinical Vaad Hakashruth, Shomrai Shabbos Chevra Mishnayos

Rabbi Chanoch Ehrentreu, Kollel Toronto

Rabbi Mendel Kaplan, Chabad Flamingo

Rabbi Uri Kaufman, Agudath Israel Anshei Kielce

Rabbi Yaakov Kaufman, Yeshivas Mishkan Hatorah

Rabbi Baruch Lichtenstein, Kahal Toras Chesed

Rabbi Rafi Lipner, Shaarei Tefilah

Rabbi Yirmiya Milevsky, Congregation B'nai Torah

Rabbi Yosef Oziel, Petah Tikvah Anchse Castilla

Rabbi Mordechai Scheiner, Kollel Ohr Yosef

Rabbi Dovid Schochet, Chabad Lubavitch

Rabbi Chaim Strauchler, Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue

Vaad HaRabonim of Toronto