

VA'AD HARABANIM RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC

PO BOX 1233 Teaneck, NJ 07666 • (844) 895-RCBC • <https://www.rcbcvaad.org>



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May 13, 2020

י"ט אייר תש"פ

Dear Friends,

As the numbers of confirmed new cases of COVID-19 in our community continue to drop, we are writing to update you on our thought process as we begin to plan for the future. While that future is still very uncertain and everything is subject to change, what follows are the positions of the RCBC as things currently stand.

Patience. We all desire to see the end of this difficult period of lockdown, especially as we see the decline of new COVID cases in our area. Nevertheless, we must maintain our patience and remain steadfast in our responsibility to refrain from acting prematurely. We must realize that the current religious mission with which we have been charged is to focus on our communal health and to worship Hashem from home. We are indeed hopeful that we will be able to resume gatherings in the near future. While we will do so just as soon as it is deemed prudent in consultation with halachic authorities and health experts, we cannot predict the exact time or date and we will not compromise on the integrity of our decision making process. We must all therefore try to be as patient as possible.

OU-RCA Guidance. A letter was recently written jointly by the OU and RCA setting out some key points of guidance regarding the resumption of public davening. This was prepared following halachic consultation with Rav Hershel Schachter, Rav Mordechai Willig, Rav Dovid Cohen and Rav Asher Weiss, shlit'a. The letter may be seen [here](#). The RCBC is fundamentally aligned with the principles set out in this letter. Below are some of the salient points that we would like to highlight:

1. **Unity:** We continue to strive for a unified approach and communication as we move forward because we feel that it is critical to communal well-being. We are committed to working together to continue to navigate this situation with a uniform approach.
2. **Controlled, Planned Outdoor Minyanim:** It is possible that the first minyanim to convene will be arranged outdoors because of the medical benefits of ventilation. Nevertheless, these minyanim will need to be organized and sanctioned in a controlled fashion and absolutely cannot take place now. We appreciate that this is especially difficult for *bnai mitzvah*, *chiyuvim* and *chagim*, but we must all act responsibly in the face of this unprecedented crisis.
3. **Timing:** It is hard to predict the exact moment for us to begin to reconvene. Given the high level of interaction that our communal life entails, as well as the enormous responsibility that the Torah places on all of us to maintain safety, we will continue to be cautious. We are inclined to follow the recommendation of the OU/RCA and wait some time after gatherings become legal in order to be sure that the opening does not contribute to another surge.

Shavuot: The government has not yet announced the beginning of stage one and we remain in a mandated lockdown. As such, minyanim in our community on Shavuot, inside or outside, remain prohibited. Likewise, as of now, all other restrictions, such as gathering for meals (indoor or outdoor) with friends and family who are not currently living together similarly remain in place. Talking to others should be done only at a safe distance **and** while wearing a mask.

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Masks: We encourage everyone to follow the recommendation of the CDC to wear a mask when appropriate, especially when walking outside on Shabbos or Yom Tov in an area when one is likely to see and speak to others. You can find more information about the CDC recommendations regarding masks here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/cloth-face-coverings-information.pdf>

Plasma Donation and Antibody Testing: Anyone who thinks that he or she might be able to donate plasma, is urged to get tested. There is information about a local testing site here: <https://www.covidplasmavealife.com/>. In addition, Holy Name Hospital is starting to test the public for antibodies. Please fill out this form to be contacted by the hospital for the simple test: <https://forms.gle/fmsrPqbWnh15s8uMA>. It seems that widespread testing can help us get a better handle on the spread of this disease. Any of the various testing programs are good as long as you get your own results. (Please note that positive antibody testing may enable the donation of plasma but we do not yet know if it confers true immunity. Therefore, people who test positive for antibodies should continue to practice social distancing as before.)

Non-COVID Medical Attention: There is currently a widespread fear of going to doctors' offices or hospitals because of the possibility of contracting COVID there. We are assured by the medical professionals, however, that all necessary precautions are being taken to assure patient safety on those locations. There may therefore be much more to lose by staying home and neglecting necessary medical attention. We therefore encourage anyone who needs medical attention to be sure to get it.

While the ongoing departure from the normal rhythm of our spiritual and communal lives is challenging at many levels, we take deep pride and comfort in continuing to fulfill the mandates of the Torah as they exist to safeguard life, and thereby to sanctify His Name. In so doing, we uniquely reaffirm the spirit expressed by our ancestors when the Torah was first given, *na'aseh v'nishma*, indicating that our singular objective is to fulfill the Will of Hashem, whatever that requires at a given moment. We are also inspired by the support and commitment of our community through this difficult time and by the ongoing opportunities for spiritual growth that it has presented. We look forward to celebrating this Shavuot like the very first Shavuot, "as one person, with one heart".

Sincerely,

Vaad HaRabanim of Bergen County