

VAAD HARABBANIM OF CHERRY HILL

RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF CHERRY HILL

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Rabbi Bernard Rothman

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Rabbi Ephraim Epstein

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Rabbi Yonah Klahr

Rabbi Mendel Mangel

Rabbi Bernard Rothman

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REPRESENTATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Chabad of Cherry Hill

Community Kollel of Cherry Hill

Congregation Sons of Israel

Foxman Torah Institute

Politz Day School

Torah Links of South Jersey

Young Israel of Cherry Hill

May 18, 2020

With Heavenly protection from The Almighty along with the selfless adherence to the mandated social distancing guidelines by each individual, we have merited to see low rates of infection from the COVID-19 pandemic in our community.

As the Governor of the State of New Jersey has begun and continues to relax some of the emergency restrictions, the issue of reopening Houses of Worship and resuming religious services has been raised throughout our community.

As spiritual leaders, we most certainly appreciate the desire of each person to actualize their full potential through connecting with The Almighty with a Minyan. Nevertheless, since the preservation and protection of life is paramount, at the present, the reopening of our shuls and religious institutions indoor facilities, is currently untenable.

The Vaad HaRabbanim of Cherry Hill has engaged in intense and prolonged consultation with local law enforcement and health officials, medical experts knowledgeable in the field of infectious diseases and familiar with our community, the Regional Security Director for the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey, and senior Torah leaders. In addition, we have thoroughly reviewed the guidelines issued by national Orthodox organizations and participated in their leadership zoom conferences. We have concluded that it is reasonable for shuls and religious institutions in Cherry Hill to begin the baby-steps phasing-in of limited outdoor religious services, subject to the strict adherence to an enforceable set of uniform best-practice guidelines (please see details below).

Not all shuls will function on the same timeline, and some may include additional guidelines. Each institution will determine the exact date and time for its resumption of services based on its physical set-up, membership, and ability to ensure strict compliance with established protocols. It is critical that we appreciate and respect the decision-making process of each shul and religious institution.

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Future steps, always conforming to New Jersey and local statutes, will be determined in tandem with health and law enforcement officials, monitoring relevant data and other factors, including our ability to strictly conform to protocols for outdoor religious services, as well as compliance with other social distancing measures. We will also be informed by the experience of other communities.

We have been presented with a volatile, sneaky, and deadly virus. This first baby-steps phasing-in of limited outdoor religious services, should Heaven forbid not be viewed as a signal to lower our guard! We cannot overemphasize the importance of the need to continue to maintain and encourage strict and responsible adherence to the mandated social distancing guidelines as well as to the CDC recommendations in regards to personal hygiene.

In closing, now more than ever, we must strengthen our commitment to Torah study, performance of mitzvos, and engaging in selfless acts of chesed. May we merit that The Almighty - the true Healer of all flesh, grant a Refuah Sheleima to all who are ill, and bring an end to this terrible virus, speedily in our days. Amen.

General Guidelines for Outdoor Religious Services

- ◆ Registration and confirmation with your shul or religious institution. Each shul or religious institution will formulate its own registration and attendance policies (information to follow).
- ◆ No indoor access. This includes no indoor bathroom use. Access to the shul or religious institution building is allowed in case of urgent health or security emergency only!
- ◆ Social Distancing at a minimum of 8 feet. Greater distances are praiseworthy.
- ◆ Clearly delineated (i.e. caution tape, chalk or spray paint) individual prayer spaces and walking lanes. One person per designated space.
- ◆ Masks must be put on and properly worn from prior to exiting one's vehicle, through the entire service, and including until after one's return into their own vehicle. This includes those leading services in any capacity. No exceptions.
- ◆ Each service is capped at exactly 10 adults over the age of Bar Mitzvah who comprise a Minyan. No exceptions!

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- ◆ No congregating or socializing before or after services.
- ◆ Individuals with symptoms of any illness other than allergies are forbidden to attend!
- ◆ Individuals who due to their age or medical history may be considered high-risk, should consult with their physician as to whether it is prudent for them to attend services. Even if reciting Kaddish or for Yahrtzeit.
- ◆ It is strongly recommended that individuals who are immunocompromised, or who are members of households with other immunocompromised occupants, should not attend services. Even if reciting Kaddish or for Yahrtzeit.
- ◆ Each participant must have their own religious articles (i.e. Siddur, Chumash, Kippah, Tallis, Tefillin, etc.) that only they use or touch.
- ◆ In the event of inclement weather (i.e. rain, heat, etc.), services will either continue as scheduled, be rescheduled or cancelled. No indoor services!
- ◆ Outdoor services should be conducted out of the sightline of passersby, if possible.
- ◆ Each service will be under the strict guidance of the Rabbi or his appointee. As per law enforcement, non-compliance will result in a ban on attendance.
- ◆ Religious service dates and times should be submitted to the Cherry Hill Police Department. This will enable the department to provide security and monitor for compliance.
- ◆ As per law enforcement, should any of these guidelines be violated, the service will be halted or cancelled.
- ◆ Additional recommendations, guidelines, best-practices, and how-to prepare for outdoor services, for service organizers (i.e. Torah Reading and Lifting, length and speed of services, singing, etc.) and attendees (i.e. appropriate outdoor dress, water, hand sanitizer, chairs, gloves, etc.), will be forthcoming.

Please remember that we are dealing with pikuach nefesh - any individual who does not strictly comply with the above general guidelines (and any additional institutional guidelines), will not be allowed to attend services. Additionally, as per local law enforcement, community-wide discipline at large and at each service is required for these services to continue, and for us to progress to subsequent stages of further reopening as time goes on.

For more information or to contact the VRCH, please email info@vroch.org.