

Dear downtown New Haven Jewish community,

This message is primarily for folks who are currently in New Haven.

We are reaching out to offer guidance and support as each of us, individually and as a community, navigates the uncharted and confusing choices presented to us by COVID-19. The following themes were discussed and agreed on in conversation with Rabbis Shua Rosenstein and Meir Chaim Posner of Chabad at Yale.

First, and most important, you're not alone. We are thinking of you, and are here to support you in every way we can. This email is one expression of that, and there will be more in the coming days b'H.

Because this situation is so fluid, the guidelines below represent our thinking for the coming Shabbat and weekend. We plan on continuing to be in touch and updating this information in the early part of next week.

We are walking a fine line: gathering over food, prayer, and shared conversation is the lifeblood of our community - and meets all of our very real needs for friendship and contact, especially those of us whose workplaces have gone remote and who live alone. At the same time, it is precisely in this social dimension that public health officials are urging us to exercise caution and care, in order to slow the spread of COVID-19 to a manageable pace.

1. Slifka Center is closed and will not host any gatherings, including minyanim.
2. We encourage you to use discretion in gathering outside of Slifka. Gatherings should be small, in large spaces, and conscientiously planned. Everyone present should wash their hands for 20 seconds at the beginning and end of their time together, ensure the venue and set-up allow for a distance of six feet between participants - and maintain this distance throughout.
3. If you are isolated and in need of social contact, please reach out to us. And - if you know someone who is lacking for community, please reach out to them. Phone, text, meeting in homes where social distance can be maintained, and meeting in public spaces are the kinds of gatherings with the greatest ratio of benefit to risk.
4. COVID-19 is already creating real financial distress, including among members of our community. If you find yourself in need of food, medical supplies, or support paying basic bills, please be in touch. We cannot promise to be able to meet all the community's need, but the more we know, the more we can help.

In moments like these, we have the challenge and the opportunity to rise up in support of one another, and to be good citizens of our larger community - especially to elderly residents of New Haven who are in the greatest danger. It may be tempting to downplay the dangers as low percentages, or that the outbreak is not yet here, and to insist on our need for uncompromised regularity in celebrating Shabbat. And it is against just such a temptation that Rabbi Moses Isserlein (Terumat Hadeshen #58) insisted that Jews put out any fire that breaks out on Shabbat, even if there

is only the slightest chance of its posing a threat to human life, “because in cases of saving a life, we do not require likelihood” - but only possibility, no matter how remote. In some versions, he quotes his teacher Rabbi Aharon, whose primary concern is that Shabbat observance may lead Jews to “remain inactive and endanger life.” Let us not remain inactive, and let us sustain life in celebrating Shabbat and community with all due caution and care.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Jason Rubenstein, Howard M. Holtzmann Jewish Chaplain at Yale

Rabbi Alex Ozar, Co-Director, OU-JLIC Program at Yale

Lauren Steinberg, Co-Director, OU-JLIC Program at Yale

Rabbi Isaama Goldstein-Stoll, Senior Jewish Educator at Yale