

Updated November 2020

Reform Judaism guidelines for returning to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions

Our synagogue buildings may have been closed but our communities have always remained open and thriving. This document has been written by a partnership consisting of lay leaders, The Assembly of Reform Rabbis and Cantors along with Reform Judaism.

The summary by the UK government is:

“Places of Worship will be closed, unless they are being used for:

- Funerals
- To broadcast acts of worship
- Individual prayer
- Formal childcare or where part of a school.
- Essential voluntary and public services, such as blood donation or food banks
- Other exempted activities such as some support groups”

Therefore

Services

It is permitted to lead a service that is being joined online from the Synagogue. If you do so and have more than service leader you should ensure social distancing, not passing objects between them etc. There will not be any congregation present. If musicians and singers are usually part of the service they may participate but only if their presence is absolutely essential. There must be as few as possible and they should be socially distanced, singing carries with it a higher level of aerosol and therefore risk.

Outdoor services

Are no longer permitted. Religious groups are not exempt.

Cheder

The online provision our communities have provided has been outstanding. We have been clearly told that cheder does not come under ‘essential childcare provision’ nor is it counted as school and therefore must not happen in person.

Weddings

From 5th November no weddings (whether legally binding or not) are permitted except in exceptional circumstances.

Funerals

The government permits up to a maximum of 30 people, distanced, ideally outside and they must not socialise with each other. (This does not include anyone working i.e. cemetery staff or clergy).

Some cemeteries (including JJBS) are limiting numbers further so please check for their guidance.

Detailed guidance is at the end of the document

Stone Settings

Are permitted up to a maximum of 15 people, this does not include anyone working i.e. cemetery staff or clergy.

B'nei Mitzvah

Are not permitted in person.

Board/Council Meetings

These should take place online only.

Caring for employees and volunteers

Anyone who can work from home should do so

We strongly recommend that personal situations of clergy, staff, and volunteers are taken into consideration as you make decisions. There may be confidential health matters that they are living with that keeps them from returning to the building. They should be able to stay home without having to disclose what their condition is.

For clarification or questions please contact Sarita@rjuk.org

To be considered in conjunction with this document

[Government advice for opening public worship](#)

[Government advice for community centres \(for those who hire space\)](#)

[DfE – guidance for in-person Cheder](#)

[Guidance for funerals](#)

Risk Assessment

Our Values

Reform Judaism is driven by our values and for those events which are permitted in person (funerals, stone settings and weddings) we consider the following to be the key values which should drive decisions at this time.

- *Pikuach Nefesh*
“You shall keep my statutes and live by them, not die by them” (Yoma 85b)
Saving life is the first and most important obligation placed on us by Torah. To save a life comes before almost any other commandment. When returning to physical community life, we must not be taking actions which we know risk our own lives or the lives of others by enabling the spread of COVID-19 in our communal spaces.
- *Kol Yisrael Aravim Zeh Ba’Zeh*
“The entire Jewish people are guarantors for one another” (Shevuot 39a)
In our communities, we are each responsible for every other member. In the face of a pandemic, our actions have significant consequences beyond ourselves. We are not just responsible for the physical health of others, but for their mental

and spiritual wellbeing. We must offer support on all of these fronts in whatever ways are safe.

- *B'tzelem Elohim*

“And the Eternal created humanity in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27)

Every person is created in the image of God, and thus every person has equal value and equal standing in our communities. Whilst different groups of people may face different risks, and in some cases may need to take different actions, we recognise that every member of our communities is of equal value.

- *Lifnei Iver Lo Titen Michshol*

“You shall not place a stumbling block before the blind” (Leviticus 19:14)

People should not be put into a situation where they will falter and be unable to follow the rules required of them. Whilst there may be theoretical solutions in some cases for returning to physical activities, we must consider whether we can genuinely expect people to be able to follow them in practice.