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Roadmap out of lockdown: Guidance for Reform Judaism communities

The efforts made by community leaders, clergy and staff over the last year cannot be underestimated. This document is split into two parts; one which covers the legally permitted activities as per the Government Roadmaps (linked below) and the main section where we pose questions enabling you to create the most positive experience for your community.

Of fundamental importance is that synagogues comply with government guidance as it evolves. The important dates are 29 March, no earlier than 12 April, no earlier than 17 May, no earlier than 21 June. Detailed guidance will only be available in the days immediately preceding these staging posts.

Please remember that it is likely that some measures will remain in place after 21 June. There are two research reports that the government has commissioned which are of particular relevance to our communities – one on continuing Social Distancing measures, and one on mechanisms for certification of status. These are due to report in May. Our intention in providing this discussion document now is that you will have time to consider when to start re-opening in a limited way over the next few months.

As well as receiving information we have also given input to the development of regulations over the past year, and continue to do so. There is a regular Jewish community roundtable with the MHCLG attended by Sarita Robinson from RJ and Rabbi Josh Levy of Alyth Synagogue. Rabbi Josh also represents us on the main Places of Worship taskforce together with representatives of the UK's main religious groups.

Each of our communities has its own *minhag*, over the past year we have quickly developed new ones for being online and fallen into now familiar patterns. Synagogue life isn't going to spring back to how it was, we have to consciously create a *minhag* that embraces both those who are uncomfortable with in person activities and others who cannot wait to be back together. What is also clear is that with the social distancing required many communities will not be able to have their usual number in person, very possibly even after 21st June.

Reform Judaism are here to support you, if you have any questions about anything within this document please contact Sarita@rjuk.org

The Government Roadmaps

As response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been devolved, there are different roadmaps and proposed easing of lockdowns which apply in each of the four nations of the UK. Please check the relevant government websites for the latest information, which is subject to change and is under constant review.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for the safe use of places of worship - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19/guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship)

[Guidance on reopening places of worship: coronavirus | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19/guidance-on-reopening-places-of-worship)

[COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19/guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship)

In all cases, the proposed lifting of restrictions remains contingent on infection levels reducing, do bear in mind as you plan your next steps that there is a very real possibility of having to pause or take a step back if things change. We additionally encourage communities to consider the rules at any given time to represent the maximum allowed activity and not a target to be reached. It may be that certain activities become legally permitted, but remain inadvisable or impractical for many communities.

We ask that you act cautiously in your reopening – having created safe, well attended and appreciated communities online we do not want to rush ahead and then have to rebuild that trust.

Where to start?

Ultimately, the people in the best position to make decisions for each community are the lay leadership, staff and clergy of the communities themselves. In considering any decisions, a detailed understanding of the needs of the community; the demographics of the membership; the space and ventilation the community has available; and the priorities and values of the community should all be taken into consideration, along with any other relevant factors. Reform Judaism is here to help support this decision making, but it is vital that decisions have the confidence and support of leaders and members in each community.

Creating a plan

- Any plan for reopening should start by considering the most important values and priorities of the community. Having a clear vision of what you hope to achieve at every stage will help you to design practical solutions which meet the needs of the community.
- Planning for a reopening does not compel you to reopen. Indeed, understanding the practical implications which would be involved in reopening in-person activities may make clear to you that it would not be feasible, or would not meet the needs of the community. For many reasons, you may decide as you plan that reopening now is not in the interests of the community.
- Reopening also does not mean a complete return to in-person – hybrid models of participation are likely to be important in keeping all members of the community connected and we would encourage thoughtful hybrid ways of working to be strongly considered. These should consider how the most meaningful parts of the experience can be made accessible for participants wherever they are and avoid one set of those connected feeling as observers or secondary.
- Involved parties, especially trustees, should ensure they understand their legal obligations, particularly to the health and safety of all members of the community. This should include checking the details of insurance policies and completing risk assessments. All decision makers should be clear how their decisions meet these obligations before any action is taken.
 - Trustees are legally liable and must be able to demonstrate that they:
 - have thought through the full range of considerations for reopening,
 - are complying with the relevant regulations in force at the time, and
 - are discharging their legal duties to the best of their abilities.
- Teams making plans for reopening should represent a diversity of interests and include, or at least carefully consult, anyone who will need to play a role in implementing them practically.
- Any plans for reopening should be conservative. Resuming in-person activities in this environment has never been done before and it is inevitable that unexpected obstacles will have to be overcome. Given the importance of keeping our members safe, rushed returns should be avoided and carefully phased plans which introduce new elements one step at a time are encouraged.
- Following each step in the plan for reopening there should be room for reassessment, and the opportunity to pause or even reverse changes where necessary. Plans should be flexible enough to adapt to what is learnt at each point. The UK government has said it will prioritise “data, not dates” in its decisions – our communities should think similarly.

Key question: What activities would make the greatest positive difference to the life of our community?

Different communities find specific value in different activities. It may be that what brings your community most joy cannot be achieved right now, so the priority should be on staying virtual. Or it may be that it will be hugely enriched by a resumption in-person which can be safely achieved. Use the following questions by applying them to each activity to guide your decision making.

Below is a series of suggested stages to consider in the decision-making process. This is designed to be a tool in assisting with decision making but must not be considered a complete set of factors to consider. Conditions in your own community will raise important factors specific to your situation. Use this resource as a starting point, but not as a complete checklist. Ultimately, each community is responsible for its own reopening roadmap and must be fully satisfied that their own preparations are thorough enough to cover all locally relevant issues.

- **Is reopening for this purpose permitted and reasonable?**
 - Are we allowed to start this activity under the current legal restrictions and government guidance which apply now/will apply to our local area?
 - Have those with legal responsibilities e.g. trustees ensured that they are aware of these responsibilities? How will further decisions be checked against these responsibilities? How will decisions be risk-assessed? How do these decisions relate to insurance policies?
 - Does reopening for this activity at the present time fit with the values we hold as a community?
 - Is this an important activity to recommence in-person now relative to alternative potential options?
 - How will we manage this activity in a way that does not cause barriers for attendance? (i.e. running both online and in person)

- **Can we perform this activity at a risk level we feel is in line with our values?**
 - Can the number of attendees expected/permitted be accommodated with adequate social distancing? What is the maximum available capacity for the activity? How will numbers be limited? Do we need a booking system? Who gets priority?
 - Can our facilities be appropriately cleaned for each set of attendees who may be present, and between activities? Specifically, can this be achieved for toilet facilities?
 - All the studies show the huge importance placed on ventilation. Is your building well ventilated? Do all windows open? Can external doors be propped open? What are the resulting impacts on security and fire regulations?
 - Can arrival and departure of attendees be managed in a way which maintains distancing and optimal COVID-safe conditions? Can arrival time be staggered? How will flow of people be managed?
 - Will handwashing or sanitising facilities be available to attendees to limit potential for surface transmission of virus in the building?
 - What personal protective equipment (e.g. masks, gloves etc) is required and for whom? Will these be provided for those who need them, or will people be asked to provide their own?
 - Are there any specific elements of this activity which carry increased risk (e.g. singing - more information on this at the end of the document)? How can these elements be identified and mitigated? Do these elements need to be phased in at a later stage of reopening?
 - Will any specific items need to be handled by multiple people as this event is carried out? Can passing of items be avoided entirely? How can these items be adequately sanitised between uses?
 - Can the space for this activity be adequately ventilated to reduce transmission risk? How will this impact the comfort and wellbeing of attendees?
 - How can the time in a confined indoor space with multiple attendees be minimised?
 - Is food/drink absolutely necessary? How can any provision of food be provided in as safe a manner as possible? What safety requirements are needed in the kitchen to ensure food is hygienic? What

measures need to be put in place for the safe distribution of any food? (Food other than that necessary for worship is not currently permitted)

- Will staff, clergy or volunteers be put in contact with multiple attendees in the course of facilitating the event? How can these people be adequately protected in the course of their work?
- **Are the necessary precautions manageable for all members of our community?**
 - Are the protective measures we are putting in place likely to be able to be followed by attendees, or are they too onerous? What risks are there for breaches of safety measures and how can they be mitigated?
 - What signage is needed to adequately inform attendees of the requirements placed on them during the activity? What communication may need to be made in advance to appropriately prepare an attendee for this guidance?
 - Will there be members of the community who cannot follow the necessary precautions because of age, disability, or any other factor? What reasonable accommodations can be made for these people?
 - Will people feel disenfranchised from the community if precautions required mean they cannot participate fully? How can these members remain engaged?
- **How will a safe environment be maintained once activities have resumed?**
 - Who will be responsible for ensuring precautions are followed during the course of an activity and monitoring compliance?
 - How will cleaning, hygiene and supplies for these be monitored? Who will record this information and act when there is an issue?
 - What will be the response to any attendee who does not comply, either on one occasion or repeatedly? How will conflict over precautions be prevented and managed?
 - Who will report back to decision-makers on the outcome and challenges of reopening for activities? Who will they report back to and in what format?
 - Can the activity be tested to monitor and identify challenges prior to actually reopening? Can it be piloted with a limited group before opening more widely?
 - How will feedback on reopening from attendees be collated? Who will be responsible for dealing with this and reporting back the key findings? How will this be achieved both during the activity and afterwards?
 - If changes need to be made to procedures, how will this be decided in an agile manner? How will changes be communicated effectively to those who are impacted?
 - How will you be alerted to any attendee who subsequently tests positive? How will you perform contact tracing?
 - How will you deal with any staff, clergy or volunteers who may get ill, or need to self-isolate? What contingency plans will be in place?
- **What happens if the situation changes?**
 - It is easier to make a decision in advance on what local changes happen that may make your plan change i.e. if there is a local lockdown, mass testing locally because of a new variant, school closures. Plan it now and be clear when you may need to pause or take a step backwards.
- **The elephant in the room: Testing, Vaccines and Certification.**
 - Secondary schools, theatres (when they reopen) require lateral flow tests before people come in the building? Have a conversation about whether you request that congregants enter the building test first. Does that fit with our values? Are you comfortable making that ask?
 - Do you align your reopening alongside all adults having been offered the vaccine to make it fair/safer/more accessible for all?

- The government has commissioned a report on ‘mechanisms for certification of vaccine status’ What do you think?

Remember: the decision to resume in-person activities is yours, and you must be comfortable that you can create and maintain a safe environment when doing so. The decision not to reopen for now will always be an acceptable option. Reform Judaism does not endorse any specific reopening – we are here to support you in making the best decisions for your own community.

Additional Guidance for Specific Activities

Singing

Singing is a major part of the synagogue experience in many of our communities. Unfortunately, it is also an activity which can carry 20-times the amount of airborne particles through which the virus can be transmitted than speaking at a normal level.

The guidance is clear that communal singing cannot take place, even with social distancing and use of face coverings. It is also worth noting that the same advice also applies to instruments which are blown.

- Indoors - small groups of singers will be allowed to perform, or rehearse for performance, only where essential to an act of communal worship. This should be limited to as few singers as possible
- Outdoors - in the grounds or the outside space of a place of worship: when communal worship takes place outdoors, the congregation may join in with singing, and should follow the principles set out in the [Performing Arts guidance](#).

Activities for younger members (Permitted from phase 2)

Activities involving children require extra thought to ensure the children will be given a safe environment, especially given how younger children in particular may struggle to stringently observe precautions you put in place. Activities must not just be COVID-safe, but provide a safe environment in all of the usual ways too, which will present different challenges in a pandemic environment.

- Are any of your teachers vulnerable, how do they feel about coming back in person? How you would deal with staff becoming ill or needing to self-isolate?
- There will likely need to be special cleaning provision in place for these activities – how will the environment be kept hygienic and safe for all during the activity and between activities?
- Group sizes should be clearly controlled to account for the size of the facility, ventilation, age of children and the nature of the activity (does it involve sitting still, or a lot of moving around?). The number of people any child or staff member comes in contact with should be minimised – this includes contact with shared resources.
- School bubbles should be taken into account where possible to minimise mixing. Are parents ready to go back?
- Can the activity be carried out outdoors, where risk of transmission is lower? This, of course, carries additional other risks to keeping the children safe and those should be fully accounted for and risk assessed.

More government advice for out-of-school settings can be found [here](#)