



Purim in light of the Coronavirus Epidemic – Medical-Halachic Guidelines

לגרסה העברית, אנא לחץ כאן

The purpose of this article is to assist in performing the mitzvot of Purim, while avoiding the dangers of the Coronavirus outbreak. It was written with the joint efforts of Midaat and the Beit Hillel organization. As a preface, it is recommended one reads the [article on the novel Coronavirus disease at Midaat's website](#), which provides general knowledge about the virus and answers to frequently asked questions.

Each recommendation and guideline in this article is explained both from the medical-epidemiological and Halachic point of view. We hope you find this article useful, and will be pleased if you share it with others who plan on celebrating Purim in a traditional manner, while avoiding harm to public health, as the principle of mutual responsibility dictates.

Halachically speaking, **the risk of mass *Pikuach Nefesh*** makes it imperative to employ all the safety measures the Ministry of Health instructs us to take. These directives are based on the most reliable scientific knowledge and are periodically updated at the [Health Ministry's website](#). Their purpose is to minimize the spread of the virus from ill people, who acquired the virus abroad or locally, to currently healthy individuals. According to the current guidelines, people who might be harboring the virus are required to be in quarantine and frequently sanitize the objects around them. This is also true of people who have been exposed to an ill person. Adhering closely to these guidelines will help prevent widespread contagion.

Performing the *mitzvot* without regard to these principles is a **מצווה הבאה בעבירה (a transgression stemming from a mitzvah)**. A person prevented from performing one or more of the *mitzvot* should try and find a permissible (healthwise) way to perform it; but if one is not able to, the Halacha dictates that “אונס-רחמנא פטריה”, namely that one who is *Anus* (coerced) and cannot perform a *mitzvah*, is held as if G-d Himself has pardoned him from performing it.



General recommendations for the community

- One should abstain as much as possible from touching other people, including shaking hands (on Shabbat and Purim as well), dancing holding hands at Purim parties, kissing *Mezuzot* and Torah scrolls (either with one's lips or by placing a hand on them), and hugging and kissing other people. It should be mentioned that a person may be a Coronavirus carrier even while showing no symptoms of disease, hence the recommendation to avoid physical contact among the general population to prevent the chance of contagion.
- A person who has returned from any location abroad in the past 2 weeks, should avoid attending venues with 100 or more participants; this includes reading of *Parashat Zachor* in the synagogue, reading of the Megillah, attending an *Adloyada* party etc.
- People who require quarantine should be diligent about maintaining it, and those who break it are sinning according to the Torah (חוטא מדאורייתא), as said by the *Tosfos*: "A person should be more careful with the safety of others than with his own safety".
- A person in quarantine is considered *Anus* (coerced) with regard to public *mitzvot*; hence he is exempt from Halachic requirements done publicly (*Davening* in a *Minyan*, reading the Megillah, etc.) and may perform them in an individual manner.
- Each individual should make their utmost effort to prevent the virus' spread, and to this end one should be diligent about handwashing before and after going to synagogue, and during the services if one visits the bathroom or touches others. The *Gabbaim* should see to there being an ample supply of soap and paper towels.
- **The leaders of the community should consider helping those in quarantine and in need of assistance.** The *mitzvot* of Purim – sending of *Shalach Manot* and *Matanot La'Evyonim* (gifts for the poor) – are definitely relevant to those in this predicament. The community can assist in performing the *Mitzvah* by initiating purchase of and collecting consumer goods, directing the aid to the needy, and transferring packages to the quarantined members in a secure fashion, in order to minimize the chance of exposure of the community to the virus. This is the very essence and purpose of community life – mutual assistance.
- Reading of the Megillah:
 - It is important to air out the place where one reads to one's best efforts, by opening windows and doors.
 - One should attempt to hold readings for 100 or fewer people, in several groups if necessary. There should be as much physical separation between these groups as possible.
 - Between reading sessions and between *Minyanim*, the reading area should be ventilated for at least 10 minutes.
 - The Megillah should be read as fast as possible; "Booing Haman" episodes should be short.
 - It is advised to record who attended each reading session. This way, if it turns out that a carrier or ill person attended a given reading, the people who attended that



reading can be located quickly and advised to go into a 14-day quarantine period, thus helping to prevent the spread of the virus.

Guidelines for those in quarantine

- The quarantined individuals should not leave their house, even for the purpose of performing *mitzvot* (e.g., Megillah reading, *Shalach manot* etc.)
- A woman in quarantine whose time to immerse in the *Mikveh* has come (even if her partner is quarantined along with her) should avoid going to immerse. Guidelines for behavior should a woman's immersion be delayed can be found [at this link](#). For individual guidance, one can consult with the *Yoatzot Halachah* of *Nishmat* at 02-640-4343.
- Taanit Esther: Those in quarantine may not fast, for reasons of health and to preserve their energy should they fall ill, as they are not in the presence of family members who could assist them. Likewise, family members over the age of 60 or in ill health should not fast as well, also for reasons of health preservation [1].
- Megillah reading: Reading of the Megillah does not require a minyan [2], but does require a kosher Megillah [3].
- Those who have a kosher Megillah may use it, but one must not transfer objects out from the quarantined area. One who has a kosher Megillah may read it to those in quarantine through a closed door or window. It is not required to read it with the trop (טעמים), but the reader should be precise about pronunciation and punctuation.
- As this is considered an emergent situation (שעת הדחק), one can rely upon more lenient opinions and hear the Megillah via the radio or telephone [4]. One should hear the Megillah read live (a phone conversation or video chat). If one can only hear one reading – the morning reading should be preferred.
- **It is forbidden to transfer Megillahs in and out of quarantine**, even those wrapped in cling film or other methods, between different people in different quarantine sites; and one should not take a Megillah given to a person in quarantine until their 14-day isolation period is over and they are proclaimed healthy. As of now it is not known whether one can decontaminate a Megillah touched by a Coronavirus patient, thus one should avoid taking it out of the quarantined area.
- *Shalach manot* and *Matanot La'Evyonim* – one should use a *Shaliach* (messenger) to perform these mitzvot while in quarantine [5]. One should emphasize that the messenger should also purchase the items to be sent and no items should be taken out of the quarantined area, to prevent jeopardizing the addressees.
- Purim Seudah – can be eaten in quarantine according to the medical guidelines.



In summary: the risk of mass Pikuach Nefesh requires us to follow the updated guidelines at the [Health Ministry's website](#), designed to halt the spread of the Coronavirus.

[1] Shulchan Aruch Orahc Chayim 586 – אפילו כואבי עיניים לא יצומו. [הנחיות רבני זק"א לא לצום](#).

[2] Shulchan Aruch Orahc Chayim 590 sect. 18

[3] Shulchan Aruch Orahc Chayim 591

[4] [תשובת הרב רא"ם הכהן בנושא קריאת מגילה לשוהים בבידוד](#)

[5] Shalach manot is traditionally done by Shaliach. These days, Tzedaka is also done mostly by a Shaliach. There is no need for a personal engagement in either.