

**5781**



*High Holiday*

**GUIDE TO**

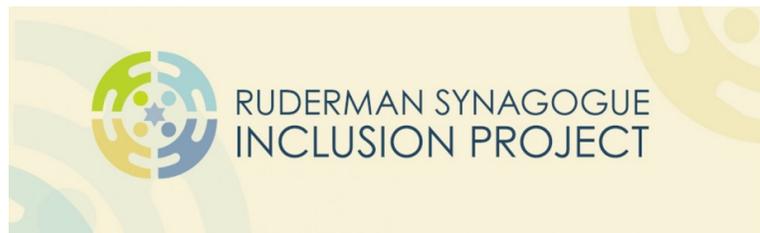
*Inclusive Congregations*



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## Why are the High Holidays 5781 different from all other years?

Borrowing one of the four questions from our Passover seder, this high holiday season will be different than all others. The novel coronavirus and Covid-19 threaten our health and safety. This new 5781 High Holiday Guide is designed to help synagogues think about and manage how we celebrate the new year in the age of virtual and limited participant gatherings.

This year many synagogues all over the world will make the decision to stream High Holiday services or to limit the number of people attending in person. We all continue to avoid large gatherings to decrease exposure to Covid-19.

Although our holidays may be different, the same principles of belonging and inclusion apply: Encouraging and supporting people to participate and feel that they belong; and ensuring that all people are included. As Jews, these are sacred values we hold dear no matter how different our services and gatherings will be this year.

Preparation for the High Holidays is different this year. As we meet on Zoom or other streaming platforms, there may be people who are not familiar with how they work or may not have tablets, computers or smartphones available to them.

Not having access takes on a new meaning. Ramps, large print hard copies of *mahzorim*, and navigating the physical obstacles of our sanctuaries and our social spaces may not be of concern, unless the synagogue has gatherings in your outdoor spaces or in the building.

Our world and our lives changed in 5820. We are becoming familiar with new ways of doing the things we may have once taken for granted. We adapt, and then we adapt again. We use our creativity and ingenuity. Change in how we do things is constant.

We do, however, remain steadfast in our commitment to include all people who want nothing less than to feel that precious sense of belonging, offering their unique gifts and strengths to the Jewish community we all hold so dear.

On July 26, 2020 we celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). With a few exceptions, houses of worship are not covered under the [ADA](#). This landmark civil rights legislation does provide guidelines that reinforce the moral mandate found in Isaiah 56:7: For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

May we enter 5821 with joy, humility, gratitude, and wonder as we revere The Holy One Who makes all things possible. Be safe and be well.

Shana Tova U'metuka!

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## CDC Guidelines for Public Gatherings

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offers guidelines for public gatherings and associated risk levels.

We must evaluate the risk of public gatherings. We will need to make challenging decisions about in-person gatherings. While masks are required in some states and local areas, some people with certain conditions cannot wear masks. What is the risk that they, and the rest of the congregation, face if they are not able to wear a cloth mask? If someone depends on lip-reading, they won't have access to a mask-wearing speaker.

The *more people* an individual interacts with at a gathering, and the longer that interaction lasts, and the higher the level of community participation in the area that the gathering is being held, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

The size of an event or gathering should be determined based on state and local safety laws and regulations.

### ***Risk Factors***

Lowest risk: Virtual-only activities, events and gatherings

More risk: Smaller outdoor and in-person gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear cloth face coverings, do not share objects, and come from the same local area.

Higher risk: Medium-sized in-person gatherings that are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart with attendees coming from outside the local area.

Highest Risk: Large in-person gatherings that are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and attendees travel from outside the local area.

### ***What you can do***

- Require the use of cloth face coverings among staff and congregants. Cloth face coverings are **most** essential in times when physical distancing is difficult.
- Encourage congregants to bring and use cloth face coverings.
- Cloth face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms. They are not personal protective equipment.
- Cloth face coverings are strongly encouraged in settings where individuals might raise their voice (e.g., chanting, singing).

To learn more, visit the [CDC Considerations for Events and Gatherings](#).

## Streaming High Holiday Services and Events

Many congregations have been using Zoom or other meeting platforms for services, meetings, study, education, and social gatherings. Streaming provides another point of entry to synagogue life. Many synagogues have experienced an increase in the number of participants, including people with disabilities and mental health conditions. This section reviews accessibility and inclusion considerations for online services and events.

### **What do people with disabilities and mental health conditions need to participate in streaming services and events?**

By now it would seem that nearly everyone has a smartphone, computer or tablet. That's not necessarily the case. In previous years, our sanctuaries have accommodated more people than the rest of the year. That means there will be more people wanting to join high holiday services and events online. Some people don't have the technology or know-how to use online platforms.

#### ***What you can do***

- Ask congregation members to donate their extra working laptops and tablets. Ask them to update their devices with the meeting platform you are using, and set up devices for internet connections.
- Arrange several collection days when devices can be dropped off outside of the synagogue building.
- Use a disinfectant cloth to clean items. Place items in plastic bags.
- Make sure Zoom or the streaming platform you are using is easy to access.
- Arrange volunteers to drop off the devices at peoples' homes or have individuals or family members arrange a pick-up time from the synagogue.
- Ask the recipients how to drop off the devices to a secure location. Congregate living facilities including nursing homes, assisted living, group homes, and senior residences may not allow visitors.
- Find out if people have support staff or family members who can help them connect to the meeting platform before services or events start.
- Many people have Facebook accounts and are more comfortable using Facebook than a streaming service. Provide the Facebook link so they can easily find you.

#### ***Mahzorim for Streaming Options***

There are a variety of ways to ensure that people have access to all of the materials you will use for the High Holidays whether meeting in person or online.

**What you can do**

- Check with your movement to see if there is a discount for group and individual purchases of hardcopies.
- Loan books to congregants who want them on hand. A volunteer corps can clean the covers and wrap them in plastic bags. The books can be delivered to people who request them and picked up after Yom Kippur.
- If loaning books, be sure to have large-print versions available for those who request them.
- Some Jewish publishers offer *mahzorim* as e-books. Include the price of each item along with its url.
- Some *mahzorim* are available as flipbooks so people can follow along on their electronic device. Email this link when you email the link to stream services. You can also include the url information in the Chat feature.

**Visual Tefila**

People access information in a variety of ways. Visual *tefilla* is how some congregations add an additional element to worship. You can buy visual tefilla packages or create your own on PowerPoint.

Make sure to include the *Misheberach*, *Kaddish*, and *Yahrzeit* lists on-screen at the appropriate time so people can see the names that you read.

## Accessible Communication on Streaming Platforms

The same considerations for making services accessible to all participants before the pandemic haven't changed. We'll examine captioning, sign language interpretation, and audio descriptions.

### Captioning

Captioning is an essential protocol for streaming. Deaf people and those who are hard of hearing should have captioning available to them. Some streaming services offer automatic captioning while others have an option for your organization or a third party to caption in real time. If you aren't sure about captioning, consider how so much of the service or program is presented verbally. When captioning is not provided, nearly all of the content is inaccessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing congregants.

- Zoom has a real time captioning option. To use it, either someone from your organization would type captions or you can hire a third-party company, such as a CART (Communication Real-Time Translation) provider to caption for you. Zoom does not automatically caption. [How to Caption on Zoom](#).
- Microsoft Teams offers automated real time captioning in English. The ideal situation requires the speaker to be in a quiet space with close proximity to the microphone. The captions are only available on a live stream and won't appear on a recorded version. Captions on [Microsoft Teams](#).
- Google Hangouts is accessible for deaf and hearing-impaired users with live captions. When you turn on the caption feature on your device, they will only be visible on your device. In order for other participants in the meeting to see captions, they have to individually turn this feature on for their devices. Like Microsoft Teams, the captions won't be available on recordings. [Google Hangouts](#)
- Other platforms with automated speech to text availability include AdobeConnect, WebEx, Skype.

### **American Sign Language Interpreters**

Zoom and other platforms offer a way for ASL interpreters to be seen on screen during services.

### **Audio Description**

Remember to announce page numbers regularly. Double check the page numbers in the version of a book you are using with the e-book and flipbook versions beforehand.

As a matter of course, describe what you are doing for blind people and those with low-vision. Remarks can be conversational.

“Rabbi A and Rabbi B, along with Chazzan C are on the bimah this morning. Rabbi A is standing at the left podium, Chazzan C is standing at the middle podium, and Rabbi B is standing at the left podium. They are spread about 8 feet apart from each other.”

“We are taking the Torah scroll out of the Aron Kodesh. The mantle, or cover, is white velvet with silver threads woven in. We use this particular cover from Rosh Hashana through Simchat Torah.”

## In-Person Services and Events

**What do people with disabilities and mental health conditions need to safely participate at in-person services and events?**

### Outdoor Gatherings

While all people are welcome, there are individuals who should not attend gatherings of any size because they are in a vulnerable category. The [CDC](#) lists the following vulnerable groups:

- Older adults
- People at any age with underlying health conditions including cancer, chronic kidney disease, obesity, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), serious heart disease, sickle cell disease and type II diabetes.
- Children who have medically complex conditions, neurologic, genetic, metabolic conditions, or congenital heart disease may be at increased risk for COVID-19 compared to other children.

### In-Person Basics

- Seat people who don't live in the same household at least 6' apart on all sides.
- Ask people to bring their own *mahzorim*, *if they have them*, *tallitot*, *kippot* and cloth masks.
- If you are comfortable using disposable masks, you could have them available for people who don't bring their own mask.

### *Tashlich*

If your synagogue is planning to hold *tashlich* services outdoors, you must consider safe access for people who use wheelchairs, walkers, and other mobility devices, balance concerns, blind people, and those with low-vision.

### *What you can do*

- If at all possible, find a body of water with paved access. Avoid hills and uneven grassy areas.
- Because of social distancing, create a set of guidelines that people must follow in order to reach the water.
- A family member or caregiver should accompany the individual. The synagogue should not be providing volunteers to assist due to social distancing requirements.
- Lay a wooden or metal ramp that people can safely use to go to the water's edge. Make sure that it is wide enough for someone using a wheelchair to turn around and return to pavement.

- Rather than have everyone meet at one time, stagger the times available and have people sign-up or assign them to a specific time.
- Make individual packets of bread to hand out individually. Offer gluten free bread packets to people who would like this option.
- Hold *tashlich* services at a location where people can park and stay in their vehicles while the clergy lead services and perform *tashlich* on behalf of the congregation.
- Stream *tashlich* on Zoom or your preferred platform so people can have access.

### **Outdoor Davening**

Many synagogues have been practicing social distancing in outdoor spaces. With temporary seating outdoors, this is a reminder to seat people using wheelchairs and walkers in the main areas. Gone are the days when people using mobility devices would sit in the back or on the sides. Ask people where they'd like to sit.

### **Access to the Outdoor Sanctuary**

These are important considerations for safe and accessible participation:

- Is the outdoor space adjacent or close to accessible parking?
- Is the ground level? Are there any "divets," bumps, sudden drop-offs, or obstacles that would make accessing the outdoor sanctuary difficult or unsafe for walking?
- Is the seating covered and protected from the sun?
- Will drinking water be available?

### **Mahzorim**

- Clean and package *mahzorim* and other printed materials in separate bags or containers.
- Have large print versions available.
- Some people will not be able to hold the *mahzor*. Have music stands on hand to hold books.
- Some people may not be able to turn pages. Having someone who is not in their household assist will affect social distancing. Attach sticky tabs to every page you'll be using to make it easy for individuals to turn pages.

### **Sign language interpreters**

Sign language interpretation should be provided when someone requests this accommodation. People using ASL interpretation should sit directly in front of the interpreter, at least 6 feet apart.

### **Indoor Gatherings**

The same rules for social distancing apply as for outdoor gatherings. Make sure that the accessible restrooms are cleaned between users.

## Pre-High Holiday Communications

Every year synagogues send members a high holiday packet with information about services and programming. This year, in addition to the packet, you will probably email updates and links more frequently so people can easily find that information. Many people will appreciate the reminders.

The key to success is pre-planning and organizing so you know what you can provide in terms of accommodations, support and access.

### ***What you can do***

#### **High Holiday Packet**

- Cover letter with brief explanation why these High Holidays will be different and how the synagogue will be safely observing them.
- High Holiday Schedule of Events and Services Checklist, and where they will be offered (in-person location and/or online).
- Inform people that the synagogue has a limited number of tablets and/or laptops that can be checked out.
- Explain that individuals who are in risk categories should stay home for their own safety and that of others. While this may seem like the antithesis of inclusion, keeping people in risk categories safe is essential. Offer the streaming options.
- *If scheduling in-person services or events, provide details for how social distancing will be observed.*
  - Include information about who should not, under any circumstances, participate in person.
  - Take peoples' temperatures when they arrive.
  - Seat people who don't live in the same household at least 6' apart on all sides.
  - Ask people to bring their own *mahzorim*, *if they have them*, *tallitot*, *kippot* and cloth masks.
  - If you are comfortable using disposable masks, you could have them available for people who don't bring their own mask.

#### **High Holiday Schedule of Events and Services Checklist**

Provide a checklist by date of all events including start and end times so people can plan ahead, get logged on, and have everything they need readily available.

#### **Pre-plan for Accommodation Requests**

Inclusion is more critical than ever before. People with disabilities and mental health conditions and those who love them have become actively engaged in Jewish life when we were gathering in-person. All of us have experienced a heightened need for

community and connection. Keep the momentum of inclusion going. Include a list in the high holiday packet of all of the accommodations that you have available.

*Include the date that requests are due to the synagogue and phone and email contacts.*

Accommodations for people with disabilities and mental health conditions for streaming High Holiday services and programs:

- Large print *mahzor* and other reading materials
- Access to the mahzor and other reading materials online
- ASL interpreter (both for online and in-person)
- On-screen captioning
- Electronic Devices

A limited number of computers or tablets are available to borrow. If you do not have your own equipment, please contact us. These will be available on a first-come first-served basis.

I would like to borrow:

- Tablet
- Laptop
- Either one
- I have someone to help me use the equipment
- I would like someone to help me use the equipment

### *Drop Off and Pick Up*

We will be dropping off books and equipment on (date) and will contact you to arrange the time.

We will be picking up books and equipment on (date) and will contact you to arrange the time.

Optional: People could also pick up and drop off the books and equipment at the synagogue on a specific date and time.

### **High Holiday Extras\*\***

*Shabbat and Yom Tov Kits* including candles, grape juice or wine, and challah (gluten free option).

*Havdallah Kits* including candle, grape juice or wine, spice box.

*Break the Fast Kits* with non-perishable foods to be delivered the day before Yom Kippur. You can also include a Havdallah kit.

\*\*Often group homes and congregate living residences may not allow candles and fires. In this case, electric candles are allowed. Check with your local Jewish Family Service, Federation, or JCC to inquire if they have electric candles to share for the holidays.