

3/30/2020

To all members of the Jewish Community,

From: Physicians of the Mid-South

We, the undersigned Jewish physicians of Memphis, would like to strengthen and reiterate the guidance issued by the Jewish institutions of Memphis with the following medical directives:

- 1. You must not join in a Seder or other Passover meals with anyone living outside your home this year. This includes family members or friends who live in Memphis, even if they have been practicing social distancing, and even if you have had direct contact with them in the past 14 days.***
- 2. Out of town guests (including children or parents) must not come and join Seder or other Passover meals with you.***
- 3. Grown children or parents who have arrived to your home after March 25, 2020 must self-quarantine for 14 days, and have no direct contact with you in your home, including at the Seder. This means that they will need to have their own Seder and other Passover meals in their own dedicated and secure room.***
- 4. Family members or out of town guests who arrived at your home prior to March 25, 2020, may only join you for your Seder and other Passover meals if they have been in true self-quarantine in your home for a full 14 days in Memphis, prior to the Seder.***
- 5. Anyone traveling to Memphis for any length of time must self-quarantine in their homes or hotel rooms for a full 14 days. This entails fully remaining inside, with no contact with the outside, including no shopping, traveling by car, and no face-to-face interaction with any individual, even from afar.***

While we recognize the severity of these directives, and understand the extreme disruption they may cause, we cannot stress enough the severity of this illness, and the degree of risk posed to both you and to the community at large by sharing Seder with any people who have not been living with you in your home. While we do not claim to be rabbinic authorities, our directives are completely aligned with halakhic directives issues by most rabbinic authorities in this regard.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit Memphis, and it will worsen over the next few weeks. As of today, March 29, there are at least 360 confirmed cases in Shelby County. This represents a 180-fold increase from only 10 days ago. The growth of these cases is expected to be exponential, meaning that the number of new cases will likely double every few days for the foreseeable future. Around the world, about 1 in every 100 people who get the disease die from it. This percentage is higher for adults over the age of 60, and higher still in those over age 80. These age groups make up a large percentage of our congregations, our communities, and our lives. Those of younger age may also be severely affected, and younger age does not confer safety or immunity. The fatality rate may be higher still depending on how many people get the virus at once. We, as physicians, hope to keep our healthcare system able to handle the increase in new cases by slowing the spread of the virus by social distancing, self-quarantining, and isolation where possible. If these measures are not effective, we expect the number (and percentage) of people who die to be significantly higher. This would mean more severe illness and death in younger, healthier individuals as well.

Social gatherings, including playdates, bar/bat mitzvahs, daily minyanim, and megillah readings with as few as 5 people have served as major spreading points for this pandemic, and increase the likelihood of spread throughout the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

The social distancing we have been practicing for the last two weeks is for naught should this directive not be followed universally in our community. Within the medical profession, even those of us who initially thought the proposed methods were extreme now understand and agree that these restrictions are necessary. We now all agree that extreme measures in prevention of this virus will prevent unnecessary deaths.

As physicians, we are at the forefront of the fight against this dread disease. We continue to work during this pandemic, as it is what we were trained to do. Help protect us and our families by not spreading this disease. Doctors save lives. Social distancing saves doctors' lives and in turn saves the lives of our spouses and children. Having seders on your own this year will help keep all of us safer.

With this said, we understand the severe anxiety and/or loneliness that curtailing major parts of the holiday may cause many members of the community. As physicians, we believe that these pains are outweighed by the benefit of keeping away from others. Physicians and clergy members are available to help with many of these feelings and difficulties. But be assured, this is absolutely necessary.

This situation is unprecedented both from a medical standpoint, and, we are assured by rabbinic authorities, from the perspective of Jewish law. We must treat it with the seriousness it deserves and be steadfast in our commitment to combating it as a unified community. With the help of the community, we hope we can avert the worst of the pandemic, that we can keep our community and ourselves safe and secure, and that we can all join together for Passover next year and for many years to come in thanksgiving and gratitude.

Sincerely,

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*\*please forgive formatting and inconsistencies*