

Dear Kahal

Firstly I apologies for the length of this message:

Without doubt the outbreak of the Coronavirus and the impact is unprecedented and will be felt for a very long time. You will have already seen the note that both Rabbi Dweck and I sent out yesterday announcing the closure of our local synagogues which I am sure for many will feel a very painful decision.

I wanted to take the opportunity to update you further, as to what steps we are taking and to try and reassure you all as best I can. From an organisational and operational perspective we are following all the current government guidelines, not always easy as they seem to change on a daily basis. The key underlying message is the need to take precautions in order to protect the most vulnerable in the community, i.e. those over 70 years old and/or individual's with underlying health conditions: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

The list is extensive but not exhaustive and coupled with the recommendation to encourage 'social distancing', we feel the time is right that we should implement stricter measures to protect the most vulnerable in the community and with an aging demographic of the S&P Sephardi community, these measures will unfortunately feel quite draconian.

They now include:

- Closing all three synagogues and cancelling all simha's for the foreseeable future
- Cancelling any future programmed events and social gatherings e.g. Cheder, Ulpan (these are now happening online), Friendship club and other planned events.
- Closure of the physical offices in Hendon - although we are able to continue to operate albeit with a slightly reduced service remotely.
- Funerals – new guidance coming from the cemeteries are the restriction of attendees to 10 men and 10 women (excluding cemetery staff / Rabbinic staff)
<https://www.edgwareburycemetery.org.uk/> and <https://www.hooplanecemetery.org.uk/>

I appreciate these are very difficult decisions to take but first and foremost, the health of the community members is paramount and given the current position, we have little choice.



What are we doing to support the Kahal?

We have been working in collaboration with GIFT to help support the most vulnerable and those most in need who are impacted directly or indirectly by the pandemic in the run up to Pesah. The services we can offer include:

- Support for shopping
- Phone Calls
- Food supply
- Online virtual visiting
- Rabbinic support (emotional or spiritual) - in terms of Nahala – the Rabbis have all been provided with a list of all Nahalot and their names will be included on the appropriate weeks during Hashcaba prayers. Also, if you require a Refuah Shelema for a loved one in need please contact the ministers directly with their full Hebrew name.

In addition we will be distributing a limited supply of Matzo and Grape Juice to those most in need. If you or someone you know who does not have access to emails would benefit from any of the above support, please email details to: support@sephardi.org.uk and we will endeavour to respond.

We also need volunteers to help us with distribution, if you can help please email the support address – your time and effort will be hugely appreciated!!

Office contact

Although the offices are now physically closed, we are able to operate remotely but our main switchboard is now closed as we have a reduced service. However, as a reminder of key numbers/contacts:

For Hebra: hebra@sephardi.org.uk or 0207 481 7843

For Accounts / Finance: accounts@sephardi.org.uk (group email to accounts team)

For Lifecycle: diana@sephardi.org.uk or 02074817827 / 07769711657

FINTA

In this challenging time, we are more than ever reliant on your continued support, with this in mind, you will shortly receive an annual reminder for finta contributions appreciating there is never a good time to ask for your support, but now, more than ever, it will be hugely appreciated.

My thoughts and prayers are with each and everyone one of you.

Regards

David

CEO S&P Sephardi Community

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The home of the Sephardi community since 1656

S&P Sephardi Community is the working name of charities in connection with the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Synagogue
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