

Dear Kahal

I wanted to update you on the our response to the rapidly changing position of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic in light of the latest government advice.

As you may be aware, the government's latest guidance as of 11th March is it has declared it is now entering its second phase of the response to COVID-19, moving from trying to contain the virus (Contain) to delaying its spread (Delay). I have previously issued some advice on minimising the spread of the virus and that includes regular hand washing with soap and water and in the absence of this, to use hand sanitisers – this advice remains. The government guidance continues to focus on reducing the exposure of the virus to the elderly and the more vulnerable (i.e. with underlying health conditions) as there is every indication that otherwise healthy individuals who contract virus will make a full recovery. It is therefore a sensible precaution that if you feel at all unwell that you should stay away from your local synagogue.

As a result of the latest update and in collaboration and agreement with local synagogue Chairs, we have taken the decision to cancel Kiddushim at the synagogues where practical – this is because the likelihood of individuals gathering together in very close proximity is enhanced with the additional risk of cross contamination with finger foods on the table. Given the Kiddush is not essential I am suggesting we suspend these for at least the next 4 weeks (i.e. until after Pesah), after this we will have to review on a week by week basis and clearly we will advise/liase with families when a major simha is planned as to how best to proceed.

In terms of synagogue attendance, at this stage there is no reason to necessarily stop attending or running services so we will continue to operate as usual but if the situation changes I will let you know. However, as you may be aware a decision has now been made to close St. Johns Wood Synagogue and all service and programmes are now suspended with immediate effect until further notice, this is due to one of the staff being confirmed to have the Coronavirus, having been in attendance at their Purim party as well as over Shabbat. We are therefore asking any congregants who attended St. Johns Wood Synagogue last Shabbat or the Purim party to kindly not come to Synagogue this week as a precautionary measure.

At this point in time I am keeping our main offices open but if the position changes, I want to reassure you that we have the flexibility to continue to operate remotely.

Finally take the opportunity to say stay well and Shabbat Shalom

David

CEO S&P Sephardi Community