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Shuls: Don't kiss Torahs or mezuzot

Health fears over religious artefacts as community braces itself for virus

An unprecedented ban on kissing Torahs and mezuzot is among sweeping measures undertaken by Jewish organisations this week to contain the growing coronavirus threat, writes Jack Mendel.



The precautions were announced as two Yeshiva University students in New York placed themselves in quarantine and the global death toll topped 30,000.

The United Synagogue (US) advised its 40,000 members at 62 shuls to avoid synagogues if they have "recently visited one of the areas or been in contact with someone who has recently visited one of the areas listed in government guidance where there are currently coronavirus clusters". It urged members to stay home if they "have been in contact with someone who has suspected or confirmed Coronavirus or have 'flu symptoms'".

The US also asked members to refrain from "slapping hands and/or kissing when greeting" as well as "kissing mezzot, religious books and the Seder Torah until the threat is over".

Should restrictions prevent someone from reciting Kaddish for a loved one, they are advised to consult their rabbi to find

someone to say it on their behalf. The number of people diagnosed with coronavirus in the UK has risen to 808.

The elderly and those with weaker immune systems are among the most vulnerable. Helen Simmons, chief executive of Nightingale Hamlet Jewish care home in Lincoln, said: "We are taking the risk to residents seriously and stepping up precautions". She added: "We have increased our infection control information for all visitors, staff and volunteers".

Elsewhere, Jewish Care is taking "a number of precautionary measures" and issued guidelines to "all staff, volunteers, residents and members across our services". Chief executive Daniel Carmel-Bonau said: "Attention has been given to the nature of our work with older people who may be at higher risk of being affected. Our priority is the health and wellbeing of those in our care".

Just weeks before Passover, Kosher Kingdom reassured customers over fears of a shortage linked to the virus. Eivzi Rolach, a manager at the store in Golders Green, said it was "taking all reasonable precautions and

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CONFETTI AND CONFUSION

Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud won Israel's third election in the past 12 months this week, but not by enough to escape the likelihood of a fourth vote this summer. Netanyahu, pictured with wife Sara, secured 26 of 120 seats. He is in court in two weeks after being indicted on corruption charges. Reports and analysis, p2, 3, 4 & 20





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Synagogues give virus guidance

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monitoring the situation with most Pesach-related products in-store or on the way. We do not envision a shortage”.

Meanwhile, El Al has limited travel to cities affected by the virus and Israel has ordered arrivals

from Germany, France, Spain, Switzerland and Austria be quarantined.

The Conference of European Rabbis has also released an advisory across the continent, urging people who feel unwell to stay at home “even if they have to say kaddish”.

