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United Synagogue: 'Don't kiss Torahs or mezuzot' amid coronavirus fears

Jewish organisations make sweeping measures to try and contain the infection within the community

By JACK MENDEL

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The United Synagogue has warned against kissing mezuzahs and Torah scrolls to prevent the spread of coronavirus

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





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NJEWISH News

The precautions were announced as two Yeshiva University students in New York placed themselves in quarantine and the global death toll topped 3,000.

The United Synagogue (US) advised its 40,000 members at 62 shuls to avoid synagogue 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 “shaking hands and/or kissing when greeting” as well as “kissing mezuzot, religious books and the Sefer 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.

Steven Wilson, Chief Executive of the United Synagogue, said it “takes its duty of care to its members and employees very seriously. We have issued careful, measured guidance to our communities and while we hope disruption to our communities will be kept to a minimum, we can all play our part to prevent the infection from spreading. Our synagogues are open, services are running, Purim programmes are planned and, for now, it’s business as usual – but we’re being careful and will keep our communities updated. We wish the community a happy – and healthy – Purim.”





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The number of people diagnosed with coronavirus in the UK has risen to 85.

The elderly and those with weaker immune systems are among the most vulnerable. Helen Simmons, chief executive of Nightingale Hammerson Jewish care home in Clapham, 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-Brown 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. Rivki Rokach, a manager at the store in Golders Green, said it was “taking all reasonable precautions and



This week's Jewish News front page





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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”.

<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/united-synagogue-dont-kiss-torahs-or-mezuzot-amid-coronavirus-fears/>

