



# Guidelines from the Houston Rabbinical Association



**The Houston Rabbinical Association** has developed guidelines on community lifecycle events in order to protect the health of our communities' members and slow the spread of Coronavirus. We remain aware that available information and health and safety issues are constantly changing. Some guidelines may be altered based on instructions from the Center for Disease Control as well as federal, state and local regulations. The County Order from Harris County states the following as it pertains to houses of worship:

*Faith leaders may minister and counsel in individual settings, so long as social distance protocols are followed. Religious and worship services may only be provided by video and teleconference. Religious institutions must limit in-person staff to those necessary for preparing for or conducting video or teleconference services, and all individuals must follow the Social Distancing Guidelines, including the six-foot social distancing.*

Based on these regulations and the Jewish value of *pikuach nefesh* (preserving life), these are the current guidelines for Jewish life cycle events.

## **Funerals**

- During the Coronavirus crisis, all funerals will be graveside services. Only immediate family should attend, or the minimum necessary for a minyan. Attendees must stand or sit six feet from each other. Primary mourners should tear their own clothing or *Keriah* ribbons. For those who wish to have an appropriate prayer when no minyan is present, The Rabbinical Assembly offers the following suggestion:  
<https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/prayer-when-there-no-minyan-say-kaddish>
- Using shovels for *Kevurah* (covering the casket with earth) is not permitted.
- Whenever possible, audio or video technology should be considered to permit participation without in-person gatherings.
- As painful as this is, those present at a funeral should not hug or touch one another. Consider placing one's hand over one's own heart as an appropriate expression of caring.

## Unveilings

- All unveilings should be postponed until it is safe to gather once again.

## Shiva

- Families may observe *shiva*, but in-person *shiva minyanim* must be postponed. Those wishing to make *shiva* visits should do so by telephone or other electronic means (Zoom, Facetime, Skype, etc.)
- Those wishing to bring food should consider a delivery service or dropping food off without entering the home.
- Families in mourning should not be placed in the position of denying entry; those wishing to comfort mourners should respect social distancing and provide comfort in ways that maintain safety.

## Birth, Brit, Naming Ceremonies

- Brit and other birth naming ceremonies should be private with immediate family only.
- All large gatherings are to be postponed until after the health crisis has passed.

## B'nai/B'not Mitzvah

- Public Bar and Bat Mitzvah services should be postponed, unless it can be done electronically. For students who have prepared a particular Torah portion, each congregation will make its own determination about how to incorporate their studies to a new Bar or Bat Mitzvah date.

## Weddings

- Public weddings should not be held. Small weddings with immediate family and/or a *minyan* may be held while respecting social distancing regulations.
- All large celebrations and gatherings should be postponed until after the health crisis has passed.