

Shalom,

Like so many in our larger personal and professional orbits, we at Or Hadash have been closely monitoring and making preparations around the potential spread of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) to the Philadelphia area. We aren't public health experts, but we do want to share some of the common-sense information that we're seeing a number of congregations communicate to their members.

While the [CDC's risk assessment website](#), which is updated frequently, states that the current level of risk of infection for Americans in general is low, nevertheless the news about COVID-19 is anxiety-provoking. In his email to the leadership of Reconstructionist communities, our own Or Hadash member Rabbi Maurice Harris shared a beautiful distillation of something I have been feeling for several days now, "The simple precautionary public health steps that are being widely recommended involve creating more physical distance and space between people. And yet, the irony is that at a time of increased anxiety and decreased physical contact, our human needs for community, connection, and spiritual support are great. Fortunately, we can all take steps to share more words and messages of love, concern, and connection to each other, to check in more often, even if it's over the phone or with a wave rather than a hug in an in-person conversation." I truly could not have put it better myself.

And now, from the spiritual and interpersonal to the practical.

### **What we are doing**

At Or Hadash we are:

- Implementing extra cleaning and disinfecting protocols in our building, in addition to making sure that hand sanitizer is available and easy to find.
- Shifting our practice around saying HaMotzi (blessing over the challah bread) from a model in which we "touch someone who's touching someone who's touching the challah" to one in which we all share in this communal moment – but not our germs!
- Increasing signage about hand-washing and the importance of safe food-handling.
- Asking our staff to stay home if they are sick to protect their own health and others' well-being.
- Asking those in our congregation who are in the medical (especially in the public health field) to identify yourselves to Or Hadash president [Phil Rosenberg](#), so that we can turn to you as resources as we continue to learn and develop procedures for our community.

### **What you should do**

We want to encourage all members of our community to take these [common-sense precautions](#) (that all of us were taught as kids we should practice in general... but sometimes it takes a moment like this to remind ourselves!):

- Practice not touching our faces or eyes with our hands.
- Stay home when we feel sick so that we don't infect others.
- Refrain from kissing, hugging, and shaking hands at synagogue events. We're a pretty touchy-feely bunch at Or Hadash, so this may not be easy ☺ Luckily, there are some ideas brewing in lots of different communities across the world. Here's [one of my favorite](#), so far!
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds – and model and teach good hand-washing techniques for your kids and grandkids. #intergenerationalwisdom.

In the coming days, weeks, and months, the leadership of our congregation will of course stay informed and up-to-date on the guidance coming from the CDC and the State of Pennsylvania. At the heart of all of this, though – beyond the hand-washing and the squirts of Purell, the elbow-high-fives and boxes of gloves in our kitchens – is the value of being part of a community that cares for one another. As we navigate this and other challenging moments, may we take the time to pause, to look around, and to see the beauty that we afford one another when we do it not in isolation, but together.

L'Shalom,

Phil Rosenberg, President  
Alanna Sklover, Rabbi