

Competency Guidelines: Sheltering & Mass Care for Jews

These guidelines are provided to inform cultural competency and reasonable religious accommodation mandates for U.S. Mass Care providers, and to assist staff and volunteers in competently meeting the needs of Jews during disaster response or recovery operations—whether at a government or private shelter, or a shelter in a Shul/Synagogue (Jewish Temple) or any other house of worship.



In Mass Care registration or service settings, a Jewish person may or may not choose to self-identify and, despite common assumptions, their outward dress or appearance may not identify them as Jewish. Moreover, ethnic Eastern European or Middle Eastern garb does not necessarily indicate religious observance. Although some Jews may feel comfortable raising concerns about their religious needs, others may not voice their concerns regarding any or all of the following issues. Please note that some of the following issues are more significant in the Orthodox and traditionally observant communities.

Special Note: When traditional Jews need to make a decision related to Jewish law (shelter arrangements, food or medicine), they often entail consulting with their rabbi, or at least a rabbi they can trust. For example, in deciding whether to eat something that is not certified “kosher” (when that is the only option), they will depend on the ruling of a rabbi. So Mass Care providers are advised to reach out to and involve a respected local rabbi.

SHELTERING

- **Greetings and Physical Interaction:** Upon entering a Mass Care setting, families and individuals who appear in Jewish dress (see next page) or self-identify as Jewish will feel most welcome if staff demonstrate a willingness to respect and meet their cultural and religious needs. These first impressions matter. Staff must also recognize greeting customs, especially between males and females. Some Orthodox Jews do not exchange handshakes with, or embrace, people of the opposite gender. Staff and other guests should understand that this is not a sign of rudeness, but a cultural and religious requirement. Therefore, when greeting a Jewish person of the opposite gender, one should wait until or if they extend their hand to shake, rather than first extending one's own.
- **Shelter Setting:** Jewish families and individuals from traditional sects will be most comfortable in sleeping settings where men are separated from women. A gender segregated sleeping space, divided into same-gender areas by a curtain or partition (acceptable), or separate rooms (preferred), is advised. Preadolescent Jewish children may accompany either parent or guardian, wherever they are most comfortable.

PRAYER

- **Prayer Rituals:** Shelter operators and residents, should be made aware that many observant Jews pray three times in every 24-hour period. These prayers are preceded by a ritual washing. In public prayer, there is a requirement to have a *minyan* (a quorum of ten) Jewish adults (usually bar mitzvahed males over the age of 13—many non-Orthodox sects count females in the *minyan*). Men are required to wear a skullcap, called a *kippah* (Hebrew) or *yarmulke* (Yiddish) during prayer and religious women may wear head coverings including wigs, hats, or shawls. Before morning prayer, it is traditional for Jewish men to put on a *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (a set of small black leather boxes with long straps also known as phylacteries). Each box contains scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah (Old Testament). Hand-tefillin are placed on the upper arm, and then strap wrapped around the arm, hand, and fingers. Head-tefillin are placed above the forehead. When at prayer, men may bow vigorously and murmur their prayers. Public readings of a set of passages from a Torah scroll take place on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays as well as Jewish holy days.
- **Preparing a Jewish Prayer Space:** Particularly at a time of disaster or crisis, prayer is important to all people of faith. Although Jewish prayers can be offered at any place and any time, a designated prayer space is preferable. It is a religious requirement that the space be free of images or religious iconography. In keeping with disaster chaplaincy best practices, a Mass Care chapel or prayer room should be established as a multi-faith space, without images or statues of any specific faith tradition. The area should be a quiet designated space with removable chairs facing East. (Jews are required to pray facing East, towards Jerusalem). Orthodox Jews will only pray in gender segregated groups within a common prayer space. Orthodox men and women must be separated by a partition or curtain. It is preferable that no one walks in front while people are praying.

Special Note: If Jews are evacuated with a Torah (biblical parchment scroll). Under rabbinic authority, the Torah would need a special designated and secure Ark (cabinet) to rest in, except for the times it is being used for rituals.

FEEDING

- **Kosher Food:** Traditionally observant Jews follow dietary rules in accordance with *halakha* (Jewish law). These dietary laws are defined by the terms *kosher* (permitted) and *treif* (prohibited). Food that is acceptable meets the standards of *kashrut*. Reasons for food not being kosher include the presence of ingredients derived from non-kosher animals (pig, shellfish, etc.) or of kosher animals that were not slaughtered in the ritually proper manner. Other reasons include mixing meat and milk, producing wine or grape juice (or their derivatives) without rabbinic supervision, or using produce from Israel that has not been *tithed* (the process of removing a little over 10% of the product, reciting certain Torah passages, and discarding the removed portion), or cooking with non-Kosher cooking utensils and machinery. Many religious Jews will only eat packaged food that contains a *hechsher* (Kosher approval). The *hechsher* is the special certification mark found on the packages of products (usually foods) that have been certified as kosher (view symbols at www.yrm.org/koshersymbols.htm). Therefore, many Jews will only eat food from kosher food sources, including caterers, purveyors, and MREs (Meals Ready to Eat). Preventing the mixing of *fleischic* (meat products) and *milchic* (milk products) has led to the practice of maintaining separate sets of cookware, tableware, and flatware for meat and dairy. If a food is neither meat nor dairy (i.e., non-dairy bread), it is considered *parve* and can be mixed with dairy and meat products, including kosher fish. The most orthodox Jews will only eat *glatt kosher* meals that are prepared with kosher food under strict rabbinic oversight in accordance with *kashrut*. Ideally, Mass Care meals should include a kosher option, prepared under supervision of a Rabbi or a trusted member of the community. Use disposable utensils (to avoid mixing non-kosher products) and keep meat and milk separated. Holiday and Shabbat meals also require a small portion of wine for ritual use.

SABBATH AND HOLIDAYS

- **Shabbat** (sabbath), the day of rest, is the seventh day of the Jewish week. Shabbat is observed from about 18 minutes before sunset on Friday evening until the appearance of three stars in the sky on Saturday night. Shabbat observance entails refraining from a range of activities, including using electricity, cooking, carrying objects outside of the home, showering, traveling, writing, working, and tearing objects. Rabbinic tradition mandates three Shabbat meals, two of which begin with a special *kiddush* (sanctification) recited over wine. All foods prepared by Jews must be prepared before Shabbat begins; in emergency settings Jews may eat meals prepared by non-Jews. Please note that several lights should be left on throughout the day and should not be turned off until the end of Shabbat. Shabbat begins and ends with the ritual lighting of candles. Mass Care shelters should provide a safe space where those observing Shabbat can light candles and let them burn out—they cannot be extinguished. Electronic candles will not suffice. A brief ceremony called “Havdallah” (separation) ends the Shabbat on Saturday night (sunset) involving a braided candle, a spice box, and a small amount of wine.

MEDICAL, EMOTIONAL OR SPIRITUAL CARE

- Observant male Jews may be more comfortable in seeking and/or receiving assistance from service providers of the same gender. Some may have difficulties in communicating openly or forthrightly with those of the opposite gender.

JEWISH DRESS

- Religious Jews may dress in clothing that may fall outside of American/Western fashion norms. Orthodox Jews may dress in 16th century Eastern European dress. Males may wear a black hat, felt hat, or *kippah* (skullcap). Some may wear long jackets. Some males may wear *tzitzit* (fringes) which hang out of their shirts. Married Orthodox females may wear a wig or a head covering over their hair. Some may wear loose fitting clothing, long skirts and/or long sleeves. It is a false assumption that Orthodox females are forced to dress modestly, and most would be deeply offended by that assumption. Men and women are required to dress modestly within certain sects. Jewish dress does not indicate a person’s level of education or reflect on a particular conservative (or liberal) religious or political orientation. However, Hasidic and Orthodox Jews can be categorized as conservative, and tend to adhere rigidly to gender roles and responsibilities and conservative social norms.

JUDAISM

Judaism, the oldest present monotheistic religion, has an estimated thirteen million adherents. Approximately 42% of Jews live in the U.S. and worship at over 3,700 synagogues. The largest Jewish religious movements are Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism, and Reform Judaism. Also, Reconstructionism and Renewal, although space does not permit us to explain the nuances of these. A major source of difference between these groups is their approach to Jewish law.

- Orthodox Judaism maintains that the Torah & Jewish law are divine in origin, eternal, unalterable, and be strictly followed.
- Hasidic Judaism is a popular movement within Orthodox Judaism. Hasidic Jews are called *Hasidim* in Hebrew. This word derived from the Hebrew word for loving kindness (*chesed*). The Hasidic movement is unique in its focus on the joyful observance of God’s commandments (*mitzvot*), heartfelt prayer and boundless love for God and the world He created. Many ideas for Hasidism derived from Jewish mysticism (*Kabbalah*).
- Conservative and Reform Judaism are more liberal in terms of religious practice, with Conservative Judaism generally promoting a more “traditional” interpretation of Judaism’s requirements than Reform Judaism.
- A typical Reform position is that Jewish law should be viewed as a set of general guidelines rather than as a set of restrictions and obligations whose observance is required of all Jews.

The religion is called Judaism, and adherents are Jews.

