

# Shofar Blowing Guidance During COVID-19

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted only short distances by droplet spread. However, blowing the shofar can potentially create aerosols that spread much farther than 2 meters. For this reason extra precautions are needed. Like with all COVID-19 precautions, a layered approach to safety is best to protect mitpallelim from COVID.

Please note, that while this guidance does use public health principles to reduce risk, there are many in the infectious diseases community who feel strongly that shofar is a still a very high risk aerosol generating event. A senior infectious disease leader at Mount Sinai Hospital in our community (Dr. Andrew Morris) has stated “There is no evidence that anything can improve the safety of blowing the shofar. The nature of blowing is to create aerosols, often with substantial force, propelled in the air. There may be no safe way of having it performed. Unless the Baal Tokea was quarantined for 14 days beforehand, and had a recent negative COVID test.”



For those who are comfortable with some degree of risk, the following guidance will reduce risk.

1. The shofar blower:
  - a. While all people davening indoors require a mask at all times by law, it is reasonable for the baal tokea to take off his mask to blow the shofar.
  - b. A baal tokea, like all people attending any shul, should be exceptionally careful not to attend if they have any symptoms of COVID or have travelled in the past 14 days.
  - c. A baal tokea for a large group on Rosh Hashana, especially if shul is being held indoors, may want to get a COVID-19 PCR test 4-5 days prior to Rosh Hashana. This is an optional stringency.
  - d. Someone who has had COVID-19 or is suspected to have had COVID-19 should not be a baal tokea within 90 days of illness (viral shedding can occur up to 90d after symptom resolution).
2. Source Control:
  - a. The end of the shofar should be covered. The optimal way to do this is with a surgical mask taped around the shofar. A simple piece of cloth is not ideal. When blowing, air should not escape around the edges of the mask.
  - b. A mask over the end of the shofar does not alter the sound of the shofar and is acceptable by most prominent halachic authorities.
3. Location:
  - a. Ideally the shofar should be blown outdoors. If davening is held indoors it is better to blow shofar indoors to avoid moving everyone outdoors (which increases the interaction between people).
  - b. If the shofar is blown indoors, it should be done close to an open window if possible.
4. Distancing:
  - a. Even with the above precautions, there should be at least 2m – but preferably 4m – between the baal tokea and the rest of the congregation.
  - b. The end of the shofar should be directed toward an open window or a wall. It should not be directed toward people.
5. Other considerations:
  - a. A shofar should certainly not be shared between people.
  - b. Some poskim have suggested blowing the shofar the minimum number of times permitted by halacha. However, if all the above precautions are strictly adhered to, reducing the number of shofar blasts should not be necessary.
  - c. With all the above precautions, elderly or vulnerable individuals should be able to hear shofar.

