Briefing: Judaism – some key religious festivals
– essential religion or belief information for NHS staff

Ensuring our working practices, information, services and premises are fair and accessible to all sections of our local communities

Introduction

This Briefing sets out to share information to CCG and CSU staff to raise awareness of Judaism festivals and providing support in the workplace and in NHS healthcare.

As well as annual festivals, observant Jews keep a holy day each week, called the Sabbath or Shabbat, which occurs on Saturday. Work is forbidden on the Sabbath as well as on some Jewish holidays.

Jewish holidays are celebrated on fixed dates in the lunar Jewish calendar, but this calendar varies in relation to the solar calendar used in the west. This means that the holidays move around with relation to western dates.

What is Passover? (Pesach)  Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread

In Jewish tradition, Passover celebrates God's liberation of the Jews from slavery in ancient Egypt over 3,300 years ago. It is one of the most widely observed Jewish festivals.

When is Passover?

Passover lasts for 7 or 8 days depending on the Jewish movement concerned. **Passover 2018** will be celebrated from March 31 - April 7. The eight-day festival of Passover is celebrated in the early spring, from the 15th through to the 22nd of the Hebrew month of Nissan, March 31-April 7, 2018.

What do people do during Passover?

Practices and observances throughout Passover vary according to the branch of Judaism concerned, and the beliefs of the individual.

Some Jews may wish to observe the Passover by not working on the first, second, seventh and eighth days of Passover. Passover usually involves avoiding 'chametz', typically wheat, rye, barley, spelt and oats that have not been cooked within 18 minutes after first coming into contact with water. Jewish people may also use Passover to observe their religion in more depth around this time (for example by attending temple services).
What is Rosh Hashanah

*Rosh Hashanah 2018* will begin in the evening of Monday 10 September and ends in the evening of Tuesday 11 September.

Jews eat apples dipped in honey to symbolise hope for a sweet new year.

Rosh Hashanah is the **Jewish New Year**, when Jews believe God decides what will happen in the year ahead. The synagogue services for this festival emphasise God's kingship and include the blowing of the shofar, a ram's horn trumpet.

This is also God's time for judgement. Jews believe God balances a person's good deeds over the last year against their bad deeds and decides their fate accordingly.

The 10 days beginning with Rosh Hashanah are known as the Days of Awe, during which Jews are expected to find all the people they have hurt during the previous year and apologise to them. They have until Yom Kippur to do this.

What is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement? - on September 19, 2018

The Day of Atonement is regarded as a sacred and solemn occasion, on which synagogue attendance is particularly important. On Yom Kippur Jews believe God makes the final decision on who will live, die, prosper and fail during the next year, and seals his judgement in the Book of Life.

It is a day of fasting. Worship includes the confession of sins and asking for forgiveness, which is done aloud by the entire congregation.

Key workplace considerations during Jewish festivals

- Jewish observances start at sunset of the previous day, meaning that some flexibility to start and leave work a little earlier may be appreciated by employees who may typically work hours close to sunset.
- Employees may ask for additional leave for religious reasons. There is no legal requirement to accommodate requests but planning ahead can help and may be met through flexible working arrangements, annual leave or unpaid leave. It is generally unadvisable to offer paid special leave for such time off requests because an employer needs to ensure they do not discriminate in favour of a particular religion.
- In certain years, a considerable portion of annual leave may be used by employees wishing to observe the ‘no work’ rules of some Jewish holidays. Where the leave timings can be accommodated, it is also important to ensure an employee has adequate leave days available for these needs.
- Awareness and understanding of Passover and other religious festivals can be aided by posting information on staff notice boards or newsletters etc.
• Passover may offer an opportunity for closer team relations and teamwork - for example by raising awareness of avoiding chametz at a catered team event.
• Consider referring people to HR policies on special leave and reasonable adjustments as appropriate.

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