

Civil Service Jewish Network: Guidance for all Civil Servants

01 Introduction

This fact sheet is intended to serve as a general guide to the main practices that Jewish civil servants may practise. There may be Jewish employees who will observe all, some, or none of the practices outlined. A request by a Jewish employee should be dealt with on a case by case basis - what is suitable for one individual may not be suitable for another. And if in doubt, ask! Your interest will be appreciated, and people will be more than happy to explain how they can best be accommodated in line with business requirements. For further information, please see the Board of Deputies of British Jews' [Employers Guide to Judaism](#).

02 Friday Afternoons & Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath)

Judaism works to a calendar where days run from sunset to nightfall (classified as the time when 3 stars are visible in the sky). This means that Shabbat stretches from sunset on a Friday to about 40 minutes after sunset on a Saturday night. Once Shabbat has begun, those that strictly observe it cannot work or travel, and so will have to have got home from work by the time it starts. Apart from when life is at risk, those that are Shabbat observant in this way also do not use electronic devices, making them not contactable during this period. Since Shabbat can begin as early as around 3:30pm during the winter in London, and even earlier further north, this can mean that employees would need to leave the office before 2, or perhaps even earlier than that. Most full-time staff will be open to the most convenient means of making up any time lost at other times.

03 Festivals*

There are several Jewish festivals scattered throughout the year. These are times for religious and cultural celebration and mark events from the Bible, Jewish history and the seasonal cycle. Rituals are performed and traditions observed primarily at home and partially at the synagogue.

Some of those have restrictions on working and travelling that are almost identical to Shabbat, including then starting at sunset the previous day. The following festivals have such restrictions:

Festival	Description	2018-19*	2019-20*
Rosh Hashanah	Celebrates the Jewish new year and is time for reflection on personal growth achieved during the previous year	10-11/9 or 10/9**	29/9-1/10 or 29/9**

Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement	Marks the day that Jews believe their fate for the coming year is decided by God. A day for confession and further self-reflection building on Rosh Hashanah	19/9	9/10
Sukkot	Commemorates and celebrates the protection that God gave the Israelites during the 40 years in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt.	24-25/9 and 1-2/10	14-15/10 and 19-20/10
Pesach/Passover	Celebrates the Exodus from Egypt as well as the onset of Spring.	20-21/4 and 26-27/4	9-10/4 and 15-16/4
Shavuot	Celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai	9-10/6	29-30/5

* As with Shabbat, these festivals start at sunset the previous day. Those that strictly observe them may need to leave work a little early or want to work from home to make the most of working hours before the festival starts.

**These two sets of days are the High Holy days, which an overwhelming majority of Jews practice and will require leave for, although some Jews, particularly those part of Reform and Liberal communities, will observe Rosh Hashanah over one day instead of two.

Jews that observe these festivals will need to take annual leave for them. HR guidance will vary from department to department so please check with your Business Partner but in some departments there may be the possibility of taking religious days of observance as "special leave", at a line manager's discretion.

Dates will vary from year to year as the Jewish religion works to a lunar calendar with leap months inserted. If you would like to see dates for years to come, www.hebcal.com is a useful resource.

It is possible to add Jewish festivals into your Outlook calendar. Go to File > Options > Calendar, and click "Add Holidays" and scroll to "Jewish Religious Holidays" and tick the box.

04 Dietary Requirements

Judaism has a number of different dietary laws associated with it, known as kosher rules. Jews observe these laws in a wide variety of different ways, and to very different levels of strictness, from simply not eating pork and shellfish to a diet that requires that all prepared food be produced in strictly regulated and supervised environments.

When planning events that involve food or even when, for example, eating lunch with or offering food to a Jewish colleague, for some Jews a vegetarian or vegan option will be sufficient, but for others a meal or any products will need to be labelled as strictly kosher rather than simply containing no prohibited ingredients.

Many high street products and snacks are certified as kosher (you can check individual products at www.isitkosher.uk). It is always advisable to talk it through with the person in question, who will appreciate being asked what they need.

There are also a few fast days scattered throughout the year. For those observing, they do mean not eating or drinking until nightfall that that day. Employees may ask to work from home to observe these days and will appreciate understanding from managers.

05 Death and Bereavement

Jews have a very specific set of rules and rituals around death. Judaism requires that funerals take place as soon as possible after death, with the closest relatives of the deceased beginning a week-long mourning period known as sitting shiva (seven) immediately afterwards. During this time, those that are sitting stay at home, to be visited and comforted by friends and relatives. Therefore, those that lose close relatives will not be able to come to work for a week after the burial. Most departments will have special leave arrangements which can accommodate this.

Some Jews will also observe restriction associated with the mourning process over a longer period. There is a 30 day period and a year period where different restrictions are observed. Restrictions can include not shaving, listening to music or going out socially.

06 Modesty

Some very observant Jews observe a prohibition on physical contact between themselves and those who are neither related to them nor of the same gender. It would be considerate to allow Jewish colleagues to take the initiative when shaking hands.

07 Civil Service Jewish Network

JNet is a cross-Government Network of Jewish civil servants and those interested in Jewish culture. Information can be found [here](#), you can join our [Facebook group](#) where we advertise events and activities

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