



A VISITOR'S HALACHIC GUIDE TO HOSPITALS ON SHABBOS

A person visiting a hospital patient is performing the great mitzvah of bikur cholim. It is one of the mitzvos for which a person reaps benefits in this world, while the principal reward is saved for the next world. While visiting the sick, some halachic issues may arise. This poster addresses these issues from the visitor's point of view. Questions affecting the patient (such as adjusting the bed, using the call button, and asking the staff to perform tasks on Shabbos) are important issues but are not covered here.

BEDS- Some hospital beds are responsive to movement and adjust automatically. A visitor should not sit down or rest his hand on this type of bed because it will cause it to move.

DOORS- Hospitals generally have one of three types of entrance doors: manual, electric eye, or revolving.

Manual Doors- May be used Lechatchila*

Revolving Electric Doors which Run Continuously - May be used Lechatchila*

Electric Eye Doors- When there are no manual doors available one must wait until a non-Jew triggers the electric-eye door and then immediately walk through the open doorway.

Interior Motorized Doors- When there are no manual doors available, one must wait until a non-Jew opens the doors and walk through them when they are already opened.

ELEVATORS- Lechatchila, one should avoid using an elevator on Shabbos.

If no stairs are available or if it is very difficult for a visitor to use the stairs, one may enter an open elevator immediately after a non-Jew to avoid activating the door through the electric eye. One may not ask anyone to press a button; rather one should exit on the nearest level and walk to the desired floor.

"Shabbos" Elevators- In case of need, one may use an elevator which stops on each floor and remains open for a short while. One should enter or exit the elevator as soon as the door opens. One should not block the elevator doorway as this will activate the electric eye.

ERUV CHATZEIROS- An eruv chatzeiros is not needed in order to carry within a hospital.

HEATING FOOD ON SHABBOS

If a pre-cooked hot meal is brought for a visitor, one may not eat it until the food has cooled down to room temperature. Even if the meal was brought for the patient, a visitor may not partake of it until it cools down.

KIDDUSH

Cup- If a kiddush cup is unavailable, any cup is acceptable for kiddush - however, a non-disposable cup is preferred.

Wine/Grape Juice- If there is no wine or grape juice available for Friday night, one may wash and then recite Kiddush over challah (or even a slice of bread),

substituting the brocha of Hamotzie for Boreh Pri Hagafen. If even bread is unavailable and the visitor cannot wait to eat upon returning home at a late hour, he may daven and eat without making Kiddush.

LECHEM MISHNAH- There is a mitzvah to use two whole challahs for lechem mishneh. Any bread may be used instead of challahs. If one uses bagels or buns and they are sliced, they are acceptable with the following conditions:

1. The two halves are still attached, even if only slightly
2. When picking up the smaller piece, the larger piece remains attached and does not break off.

If no challahs are available, one can wash on two slices or even one slice of bread.

ROBOTS- Hospital robots (which may look like mechanized carts) may be used to deliver medicine and supplies throughout the building. One should avoid walking near the robots, since this will cause them to change direction, stop, or ask that one move to a different area.

SECURITY

Metal Detectors- It is permitted to go through a metal detector if one has no metal that will set it off.

Video Cameras- It is best to avoid being videoed by such cameras on Shabbos. In a hospital, however, where it is difficult to avoid this, one is permitted to walk past the cameras.

SHABBOS CANDLES- Hadlakas Neiros Shabbos is an obligation that applies even to someone who is hospital bound. Since hospital regulations generally forbid the actual lighting of candles in the room, one should light an electric incandescent lamp or flashlight in the hospital room and recite a bracho.

STAIRWELL- If the door to the stairwell may be hooked up to either an alarm or electromagnetic lock mechanism, pressing the bar or turning the handle on this kind of door may activate a mechanism which will sound an alarm or use electricity to unlock the door. If one needs to use such a door on Shabbos, one is permitted to ask non-Jewish personnel to open the door.

*with no reservation