



The **Star of David** is a widely recognized symbol of the Jewish religion.

JUDAISM

Judaism is one of the oldest of the world's religions, a description for a race of people and a way of life whose followers can be found all over the world. Jews follow the beliefs of Jewish Law, found in the *Torah* (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and the *Talmud*. The Law governs areas such as diet, worship, marital relations, etc.

The religion's leaders, referred to as rabbis, are considered to be the most prominent figures in any Jewish community. They are experts in the Law, lead worship in the Synagogue (the place of Jewish worship), give guidance in Jewish practice and often act as a mediator in their community.

Summary of Essential Practice Points:

Please refer to the full text of the highlighted points related to the following summary points.

1 **Beliefs about the treatment of illness:**

Healthcare settings should seek the advice of a rabbi when dealing with issues such as life-threatening prognosis, life support, organ donation, etc.

2 **Ablutions and washing:**

Orthodox Jews may wish to wash before prayer and before food. The bed-bound will need running water for this purpose.

3 **Food and the content of medicine:**

Dietary requirement specified in Jewish Law, *kosher*, needs to be respected in food provision to patients and in the application of medicines. Settings can buy in kosher food; details of a supplier are provided at the end of the section.

4 **Death-related religious rituals:**

The Jewish Burial Society or, if unavailable, the Communal Rabbi should be contacted if there is any threat to the person's life. Numbers can be found at the end section.

5 **Customs to be observed at death:**

The Jewish Burial Society should be informed immediately on the death of a Jewish person so that they can prepare the body in the required customary manner. The Society will not be available during the Sabbath (details of relevant timing provided under *Religious practices*). The Chief Rabbi's office has agreed a protocol that in these types of circumstances the body should be taken, still clothed, to the mortuary and left until the community arrives. At least twenty minutes should elapse after death before moving the body.

6 **Customs to be observed at death:**

Jewish Law necessitates the carrying out of a funeral as soon as possible after death. A Death Certificate should be provided at the earliest possible opportunity thereby enabling arrangements to be commenced.

7 **Cleaning and touching the body:**

Healthcare workers should **not** wash the body. They should only perform the following essential tasks in all cases:

- Close the eyes of the deceased.
- Bandage the lower jaw to the head so that the mouth does not open.
- Straighten the fingers and limbs so that they lie parallel to the body.
- The body must be buried whole, which includes any item that has the hair, flesh or blood of the person on it. Leave in place any catheters, drains, tubes and wound dressings for the Burial Society to remove. Cover tubes, etc., with gauze or bandages and any other open wounds must be covered.
- Any excess dirt should be wiped away or washed off.
- Cover the body with a sheet.
- If death occurred during surgery, check with the Rabbi and family if hospital gowns, etc., that have blood on them should also be kept by the family for burial.

8 ***Foetal, infant and child death:***

Foetuses miscarried after the first three months of pregnancy, infants and children must be buried under the full Jewish ritual. Contact the Jewish Burial Society or the Communal Rabbi at the numbers at the end of the section.

9 ***Memento of a deceased child:***

Do not offer the parents a lock of hair from a deceased child as the body must be buried whole.

Profile of Judaism in Ireland

There has been an established Jewish community in Ireland for some centuries. Census 2006 indicated that Jewish membership grew by almost 8% between 2002 and 2006, with approximately 1,930 members in 2006. Most members are Irish Jews. Contributors have indicated that recently arrived migrant workers from Israel and other places are Jewish.

The two main branches of the religion are present in Ireland:

- *Orthodox Jews* emphasise the unchanging, eternal and all-encompassing nature of the Torah, and so abide by a strict and literal reading of the Laws it contains. This group also strictly observe the rules of the Sabbath, the key holy day, and other festivals.
- *Progressive Jews* (which includes Liberal and Reform Jews) who tend to adapt tradition to the needs of modern society while retaining the spirit of their religion.

There are five synagogues in the Irish Republic. Four of these are located in Dublin, three of which are Orthodox and one Progressive Congregation, all of which have regular services on the Sabbath. There is also one in Cork that supports a very small community. They run a service once a month.

Some of those who describe themselves as Jewish may not have contact with the community and synagogue. Therefore it is important to check needs with the person or their family.

Care of the ill

Beliefs about the treatment of illness

- Jewish representatives have indicated that as much as possible Jewish Law should be respected in healthcare practice by both practitioners and Jewish followers. Where necessary, aspects of law can be balanced with the religious requirement to maintain good health. So, for example, there are leniencies in Sabbath observance, dietary laws, etc., in cases of serious illness and where there are no alternatives. Where possible a rabbi should be consulted.

Essential Practice Point

1

- Aspects of the Jewish Law may create conflicts with modern medical treatment. Healthcare settings should seek the advice of a rabbi when dealing with issues such as life-threatening prognosis, life support, organ donation, resuscitation, etc. Matters should then be discussed with the patient and family as early as possible.

Religious contacts

Religious leaders are available to visit any person indicating that they are Jewish on request from the person or healthcare setting. Lay members of the Jewish community are also available to visit any patients who might so desire. They can be contacted through the Office of the Chief Rabbi or, if unavailable, the Communal Rabbi. Contact details for this purpose are provided at the end of the section.

Religious practices

- Jews hold the *Sabbath* as a time of holiness. Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and lasts until nightfall on Saturday. The times vary depending on the time of year. In midsummer Sabbath will start not later than 8pm on Friday and run until approximately 11pm on Saturday. In midwinter Sabbath will start by 3.30pm on Friday and run until approximately 5pm on Saturday. Traditionally no work of any nature was undertaken for the entire period of the Sabbath, which includes driving. Religious Jews will not use electrical appliances on the Sabbath such as telephones, email, turning lights on and off, etc.
- Sabbath observant visitors that arrive on Friday may need to be accommodated if they do not manage to leave before the sun sets; they will not be able to travel once the Sabbath begins. At a minimum they may need to be provided with a pillow and blanket so that they can sleep in a chair.
- The same rules and restrictions apply on the festivals, most of which are clustered around September/October and *Passover* which is usually in March/April.
- Jewish women may request to light two candles / tea-lights at the onset of the Sabbath. This is an important ritual and should be respected where safe to do so.
- Jewish males over thirteen may wish to do morning prayers wearing a prayer shawl (*tallit*) and phylacteries (*tefillin*). They might need privacy for half an hour while doing so.

Ablutions and washing

Essential Practice Point

2

Jews may wish to wash before prayer and before food. The bed-bound will need running water for this purpose; if this is difficult to provide, a jug of water and a bowl will suffice.

Food and the content of medicine

Essential Practice Point

3

- Jewish dietary laws, *kosher* rules, need to be respected in food provision to patients and in the application of medicines. Settings can buy in kosher food; a recommended supply source is provided at the end of the section. Many non-observant Jews will still be quite strict about kosher food. A lack of appropriate kosher food might mean they can only eat uncooked fruit and vegetables.
- Medicines given to a Jewish patient should not contain any animal products. Where no alternative is available the person should be informed so that they can make an informed decision, possibly after discussion with a rabbi. If the illness is of a life-threatening nature and there is no alternative available then the medicine may be used.

Blood Transfusion and Organ Transplantation

There is no religious objection to receiving a blood transfusion or organ transplantation. The donation of certain organs can be very problematic and a Rabbi should be consulted.

Care of the Dying

Family and community visits

A dying Jewish person may want to see as many of their family and friends as possible, hence family visitation may need to be managed by hospital staff.

Death-related religious rituals

Essential Practice Point

4

- If it is considered that a person is close to death the Jewish Burial Society or, if unavailable, the Communal Rabbi should be contacted to ensure that they can recite the appropriate prayers. The contact numbers are at the end of this section.
- The person may wish to recite or hear special psalms and prayers and may wish to hold the page where the words are written.
- According to Jewish tradition a dying person should not be left alone and many families will wish to sit with their relatives during the last days/hours.

Customs to be observed at death

Essential Practice Point

5

- The Jewish Burial Society, the *Chevre Kadish*, should be informed immediately on the death of a Jewish person so that they can prepare the body and bury it in accordance with customary rituals. The contact details are at the end of this section.

- If the person dies during the Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday nightfall) the Jewish Burial Society will not be available to perform these rituals. The Chief Rabbi's office has agreed a protocol that in these types of circumstances the body should be taken, still clothed, to the mortuary and left until the community arrives. At least twenty minutes should elapse after death before moving the body.

Essential Practice Point

6

- Jewish Law necessitates the carrying out of a funeral as soon as possible after death. It is therefore important to assist in the provision of a Death Certificate at the earliest possible opportunity, thereby enabling arrangements to be commenced.
- Family may wish for the deceased body to be placed on the floor with the feet pointing towards the doorway and to light a candle, if safe to do so.
- They may ask for a window to be opened in the room in which the patient passed away.
- Traditionally, a *watcher* stayed with a deceased Orthodox Jew until the body was collected, either at the bedside or after the body has been removed to the mortuary. The family may request this and will make the arrangements with the community.

Cleaning and touching the body

Essential Practice Point

7

Healthcare workers should **not** wash the body. They should only perform the following essential tasks in all cases.

- Close the eyes of the deceased.
- Bandage the lower jaw to the head so that the mouth does not open.
- Straighten the fingers and limbs so that they are parallel with the body.
- The body must be buried whole, which includes any item that has the hair, flesh or blood of the person on it. Leave in place any catheters, drains, tubes and wound dressings for the Burial Society to remove. Cover tubes, etc., with gauze or bandages and any other open wounds must be covered.
- Any excess dirt should be wiped away or washed off.
- Cover the body with a sheet.
- If death occurred during surgery check with the Rabbi and family if hospital gowns, etc., that have blood on them should also be kept by the family for burial.

Postmortem requirements

- Jewish Law regards the carrying out of a postmortem as a desecration of the body. A postmortem must be avoided unless required by law.
- Jewish representatives have indicated a preference for non-invasive postmortem procedures so that the body can be buried whole.

- Where the death needs to be reported to the coroner it should be advised that the deceased is Jewish so that any necessary procedure can be expedited.

Interment ritual

Orthodox Jews can only be buried, as cremation is forbidden.

Bereavement

A funeral is followed by a seven day mourning period where a family do not cook meals or carry out any of their community or work responsibilities. Only other family members and close friends visit with gifts of food. This needs to be borne in mind in approaching care plans.

Religious Items and Symbols

Personal and religious items

Jews do not wear religious items or use any religious icons or symbols. Any items worn on the body are more likely to be of a personal nature, such as a *Star of David* (i.e. the six-pointed star displayed on the introductory page) or necklace.

Use of religious symbols

It is not appropriate to display Christian icons such as a crucifix or cross in the mortuary area when a Jewish family is using the facility. Candles are appropriate in the Jewish tradition.

Additional Notes on Maternity and Paediatric Care

Foetal, infant and child death

Jewish representatives have indicated that rituals pertaining to miscarriage, stillbirth and death among children depend on age/stage of development. In all cases Jewish representatives will manage the process.

- Where the foetus is less than three months it can be disposed of by the HSE.
- The placenta and other fluids from a miscarriage can be disposed of.

Essential Practice Point

8

Foetuses miscarried after the first three months of pregnancy, infants and children must be buried under the full Jewish ritual. Contact the Jewish Burial Society or, if unavailable, the Communal Rabbi at the numbers at the end of the section.

Memento of a deceased child

Essential Practice Point

9

Do not offer the parents a lock of hair from a deceased child as the body must be buried whole.

Developing a Jewish Community Contact

Jewish Burial Society:

Cantor Alwyn Shulman, Secretary of the Jewish Burial Society may be contacted during office hours, out of hours and for Jewish burials. The Society is not available during the Jewish Sabbath; the body can be taken to the mortuary and left until the community can be contacted.

Tel: (01) 492 6843 / 086 362 5651.

Communal Rabbi and General Information:

Contact Rabbi Zalman Lent if the Burial Society is unavailable, for general questions, and for pastoral care or chaplaincy issues.

Tel: (01) 492 3751 (office hours)

Tel: (01) 406 4818 (after hours)

For urgent queries only call 087 419 5354

The Chief Rabbi:

The Chief Rabbi can be contacted via Mr. Stewart Barling, Secretary to the Chief Rabbi at Herzog House, Zion Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6.

Tel: (01) 4923751 (office hours)

Kosher food source:

A kosher food source in Dublin indicated by the Jewish community is the SuperValu supermarket, Braemor Road, Churchtown (01 2984917).

Kosher pre-cooked frozen meals (*Hermolis* brand) are usually available for purchase. Jewish representatives have emphasised that it is very important that these frozen meals are reheated still sealed in their covers. Removal of this cover renders them not kosher if heated in a non-kosher oven.

Larger quantities of kosher meals can be ordered from www.hermolis.com

A section of the Jewish Ireland website provides information on kosher food. Go to www.jewishireland.org and click on the link 'Synagogues/Kosher Food'.

Contributors

Cantor Alwyn Shulman, Secretary of the Jewish Burial Society, provided information for the first draft of this section. Mr Stewart Barling, Secretary to the Chief Rabbi, provided information for the first draft and facilitated us in establishing contacts in the Jewish community. Chief Rabbi Dr Yaakov Pearlman, who held the post of Chief Rabbi until autumn 2008, provided clarification on specific sections of the first draft. Rabbi Zalman Lent, Communal Rabbi, revised and approved the final section.