Beefed up security forces, extra medics on alert as Israel marks Yom Kippur

Haredim, file photo – Photo: EPA

Taking extra precaution against possible terror attacks, Israel closes Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings in Gaza and imposes a closure around the West Bank until several hours after conclusion of 25-hour fast; medical teams placed on highest alert as fasting population prepares to go thirsty under Israel's blazing sun.

Israel's security forces began placing a closure around the West Bank overnight Monday while shutting the Eerez and Kerem Shalom border crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip as security forces take extra precautions ahead of Yom Kippur—the Jewish holiday of atonement and repentance.

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The closure around the West Bank will continue until midnight between Wednesday and Thursday several hours after the conclusion of the 24-hour fast, which begins on Tuesday evening.

The precautionary measure, which will also be accompanied by the presence of beefed up security forces in various locations, takes place against a background of heightened fears of terror attacks during the Jewish festivals on the month of Tishrei, particularly in the wake of Sunday's deadly stabbing attackon 45-year-old Ari Fuld.

(Photo: EPA)

In addition, extra Magen David Adom (MDA) medical workers and volunteers will be on call and deployed in various areas in anticipation of a high number of dehydration case among the thirsty population fasting under Israel's blazing sun.

Additional paramedics and first responders will be at the ready as more ambulances, emergency motorbikes and medical vehicles are put on standby. Emergency aid crews will also be put on the highest level of alert from the beginning of the fast until its end.

Each year MDA encounters attempts to block its vehicles from travelling as the roads become entirely empty on Yom Kippur. Authorities have therefore urged the public to allow free passage medical vehicles, warning that blocking them endangers lives.

MDA ambulance (Photo: Ilan Keshet)

More than 2,000 phones calls are made to the emergency 101 hotline service on Yom Kippur every year.

In addition to case of dehydration and other fast-related problems, pedestrians incur extra risk as thousands of cyclists take the opportunity to zoom through the empty roads, highways and streets, leaving unaccompanied children playing outside the synagogues during prayer services particularly vulnerable to accidents.

Yom Kippur Fast times, 2018

MDA reinforcements will be particularly noticeable near and inside the Kotel as thousands of fasters flock to the unshaded holy site.

As part of the high alert, two medical helicopters will also be placed on standby, ready to respond to possible evacuation calls from members of the public in remote areas in the north and south.

Medical teams have appealed to synagogues to prepare before the fast begins a smartphone for emergency calls only and to install the "MADA sheli" app (my MDA) that will ease the task of locating the exact point of emergency.

As shops and public transport cease operations throughout the country, the last plane was scheduled to depart from from Ben Gurion Airport at 1:50 pm. The first plane at the conclusion of the fast will land at 9:30 pm.

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