



A WORKPLACE GUIDE TO JUDAISM

A practical guide for Government of Canada managers and HR professionals in their interactions with Jewish employees

Jewish Public Servants' Network (JPSN)

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Questions about this guide? Contact the Jewish Public Servants Network at jps.gc.fpj@gmail.com - your partner in creating inclusive Government of Canada workplaces.

INTRODUCTION

Accommodation is a core element of the federal government's strategy to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. For Jewish employees some practices may require certain accommodations.

Different Jewish people have different levels of observance which may change and evolve over time. Each person determines their own level of observance. For managers who have observant Jewish staff, there may be a need for accommodations. For an observant Jewish person, Jewish law provides specific guidance for how to lead a spiritual life. This means that it is not possible for the observant Jew simply to waive, for example, observance of Shabbat, except in very specific circumstances set out in Jewish law, e.g., risk to life.

We have set out in this pamphlet our best understanding of best practices to recognize or accommodate Jewish religious observance. It is always important to ensure that your decisions regarding accommodation are taken in consultation with your human resources and labour relations advisors. The JPSN cannot accept any liability for actions taken in reliance on this document.

WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS

Judaism at a Glance:

- 400,000 Jews in Canada (1% of population)
- Most targeted group for hate crimes in Canada - more than any other group (including by race or ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation)
- As Jewish people are often victims of antisemitic aggressions and microaggressions, it is important to include them in anti-racism and inclusion initiatives
- Diverse community spanning all backgrounds, identities, and observance levels
- Both religion and ethnicity - not all Jews are religious

Bottom line: *Creating inclusive workplaces requires understanding the needs of Jewish employees and combating antisemitism. Including Jewish people is desired and should be strived for across federally regulated workplaces. Jewish people should be believed when they indicate they have been a victim of antisemitism.*

Major Jewish Denominations

Judaism has different branches of practice. The main ones are:

- Orthodox – strict observance of Jewish laws, Shabbat, and holidays (refrain from work, commerce, etc.), and dietary restrictions (keeping kosher).
- Conservative – considered a centrist approach, maintaining traditional practices, and allowing for some modern adaptations. Many keep kosher and observe Shabbat and Jewish holidays by refraining from work.
- Reform – Emphasizes Jewish ethics and social justice, known as tikkun olam. Adapts Jewish traditions to current times, allowing personal choice for observance.
- Reconstructionist – A smaller movement than the others, emphasizing Jewish values and practices rather than seeing Judaism a rigid and immutable religion.

Bottom Line: *Jews have many different types of religious practice. As with other religions, some people convert to Judaism. Many Jews are non-practicing but still identify as Jewish.*

Key Accommodations at a Glance

Need	When	Accommodation
Shabbat	Friday evening to Saturday evening	Early Friday departure in winter (time varies by season. Shabbat starts late in summer)
Major Holidays¹	13 days annually	Time off (can use leave or make other arrangements with managers).
Dietary Laws	Ongoing	Kosher food options at events
Prayer	3x daily	Quiet space, flexible lunch timing
Mourning	After death in family	Up to 7 days off for immediate family

Shabbat: What Managers Need to Know

When: Friday before sunset to Saturday after dark (25 hours total)

¹ While Jewish holidays are typically in the same season, they are not on the same date each year. Jewish holidays are determined by the Jewish calendar which is a modified lunar calendar (in contrast to the regular calendar we use).

What it means: No work, travel (except walking), phones, computers, or money transactions

Your role:

- ✓ Allow early Friday departure (time varies by season - employee can provide calendar)
- ✓ Enable flexible hours to make up time on other days
- ✓ Plan major deadlines for other days when possible

Pro tip: Sunset times change throughout the year. Departure could be as early as 2 PM during the winter months; in summer, 7 PM.

Jewish Holidays: The Essentials

6 major holidays annually - dates change each year (modified lunar calendar)

The Big Three (most likely to need time off):

- **Rosh Hashanah** (New Year) - 2 days, September/October
- **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement) - 1 day, September/October
- **Passover** - 8 days, March/April (first 2 and last 2 days are the most important)

Also Important:

- **Shavuot** - 2 days, May/June
- **Sukkot and Shmini Atzeret/ Simchat Torah** - 9 days, September/October (first 2 and last 2 days are the most important)

Other holidays:

- **Purim** (March), **Tisha B'Av** (July/August), and **Hanukkah** (December) are minor holidays where work is allowed

Bottom Line: *There are enough options available in collective agreements for observant Jews to take for Jewish holidays. Rarely is there a calendar year where all major holidays fall on weekdays.*

Management tips for Jewish holidays:

- Employee should give advance notice

- Treat like any leave request, or adopt other approaches (e.g., time management not time off)
- A maximum of 13 days where there is a requirement to refrain from work, but rarely if ever, do all holidays fall on weekdays in one year

Food & Events: Keeping Everyone Included

Kosher Basics

Some employees require:

- Certified kosher food only (i.e., food that has been prepared under the supervision of a certifying agency)
- Separate storage/heating from non-kosher food
- Professional kosher catering (not "kosher-style")

Note: Halal ≠ Kosher. Different rules apply.

Easy Solutions

- Fresh uncut fruit or vegetables is always an option
- Use certified kosher caterers for major events
- Always ask about dietary needs when planning

Dress Code Considerations

Some Jewish employees may:

- Men: wear kippahs (head covering)
- Women: Dress modestly (long sleeves, longer skirts, hair covering if married)
- Prefer not to shake hands with opposite gender

Your approach: When in doubt, ask respectfully. Follow their lead on handshakes.

Prayer Needs (usually can be done outside of regular work hours)

Frequency: 3 times daily

- Morning: Usually before work

- Afternoon: Lunch time/afternoon (in winter) or early evening (in summer)
- Evening: After work

What helps:

- Designated quiet room
- Flexible lunch scheduling
- Understanding if mourning requires synagogue attendance (needs 10 people for certain prayers)

Bereavement Considerations

Immediate Response

- **Funeral:** Must happen quickly (often the next day)
- **Shiva:** up to 7 days at home for immediate family (parents, children, siblings, spouse)

Ongoing Impact (30 days to 11 months)

- May not shave/cut hair (30 days)
- Avoid music/social events
- Daily prayer attendance for mourning prayers
- Needs schedule flexibility for synagogue attendance

Your role: Show compassion, allow flexible hours for prayers, colleagues can attend funeral/shiva visits

Recruitment & HR Essentials

Do:

- ✓ Clearly state job requirements upfront
- ✓ Allow candidates to raise accommodation needs during interview process
- ✓ Work collaboratively on reasonable solutions
- ✓ Put agreements in writing
- ✓ Handle requests case-by-case (observance levels vary)

Don't:

- ✗ Ask about religious affiliation unless job-relevant
- ✗ Assume all Jewish employees have same needs
- ✗ Refuse accommodation without exploring options

Combating Antisemitism

Warning Signs

- Comments about: Money, power, dual loyalty, conspiracy theories
- Physical: Vandalism of Jewish symbols and property, harassment, Holocaust denial/minimization, antisemitic graffiti (e.g., swastika)
- Assumptions: Speaking for Israel, explaining Middle East politics

Your Responsibilities

- Create safe spaces: No pressure to discuss Israel/Middle East
- Check In: This is an incredibly hard and scary time for many Jews in Canada so checking in to see how they are doing will likely be appreciated
- Include in DEI: Jewish experience belongs in anti-racism initiatives
- Provide training: Educate staff on antisemitism. The Canada School of Public Service has a course on [Addressing Antisemitism in the Workplace \(INC135\)](#)
- Take reports seriously: Believe Jewish employees when they report antisemitic incidents
- Stay alert: Antisemitism often spikes during Middle East tensions

Conflict Resolution: Best Practices

Step 1: Early Discussion

- Talk when issues first arise, not during crisis
- Involve HR when needed
- Get union rep if applicable²

² It should be noted that a number of public servants have filed complaints against certain public service unions and their capacity to fairly provide services to Jewish public servants has come into question.

Step 2: Creative Solutions

- **Shabbat conflicts:** Flexible hours, job sharing, remote work options
- **Holiday scheduling:** Advance planning, coverage swaps, unpaid leave
- **Deadline issues:** Front-load work, delegate time-sensitive tasks

Step 3: Document Agreements

- Put accommodations in writing
- Review periodically
- Update with management changes

Quick Reference Resources

Need immediate help? Contact:

- Jewish Public Servants Network (JPSN): First point of contact
- Your HR Department: For policy guidance
- Employee's Union Rep: For representation (see footnote above)

Online Resources:

- Jewish calendar dates: hebc.com
- Kosher caterers: Search "[your city] kosher catering" (must be kosher “certified”; kosher “style” is not acceptable)

REMEMBER: FLEXIBILITY WORKS

Most accommodations are simple:

- Time management (not time off)
- Planning ahead (not last-minute scrambling)
- Mutual respect (not special treatment)
- Listening (and not assuming)

The payoff: Engaged employees who can bring their whole selves to work.

Major Jewish Holidays Calendar 2025-2029

Below is an overview of major Jewish holidays observed from 2025 through 2029. The table presents the holidays in chronological order and lists each date under its respective year to facilitate planning. Note: Jewish holidays generally start at sunset the evening before the day listed below.

Festival	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Purim	March 14	March 3	March 23	March 12	March 1
Passover	April 13-20	April 2–9	April 22–29	April 11–18	March 31 – April 7
Shavuot	June 2–3	May 22–23	June 11–12	May 31–June 1	May 20–21
Tisha B'Av	August 3	July 23	August 12	August 1	July 22
Rosh Hashanah	Sept 23–24	Sept 12–13	Oct 2–3	Sept 21–22	Sept 10–11
Yom Kippur	Oct 2	Sept 21	Oct 11	Sept 30	Sept 19
Sukkot	Oct 7–13	Sept 26–Oct 2	Oct 16–22	Oct 5–11	Sept 24–30
Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah	Oct 14 – 15	Oct 3 - 4	Oct 23 -24	Oct 12 -13	Oct 1-2
Hanukkah	Dec 15-21	Dec 5–12	Dec 25-Jan 1	Dec 13-20	Dec 2–9

On major holidays, work is traditionally prohibited. This includes the first two and last two days of Passover and the first two days of Sukkot. It is permissible to work on Chanukah and Purim and discouraged rather than strictly not permissible on Tisha B'Av.