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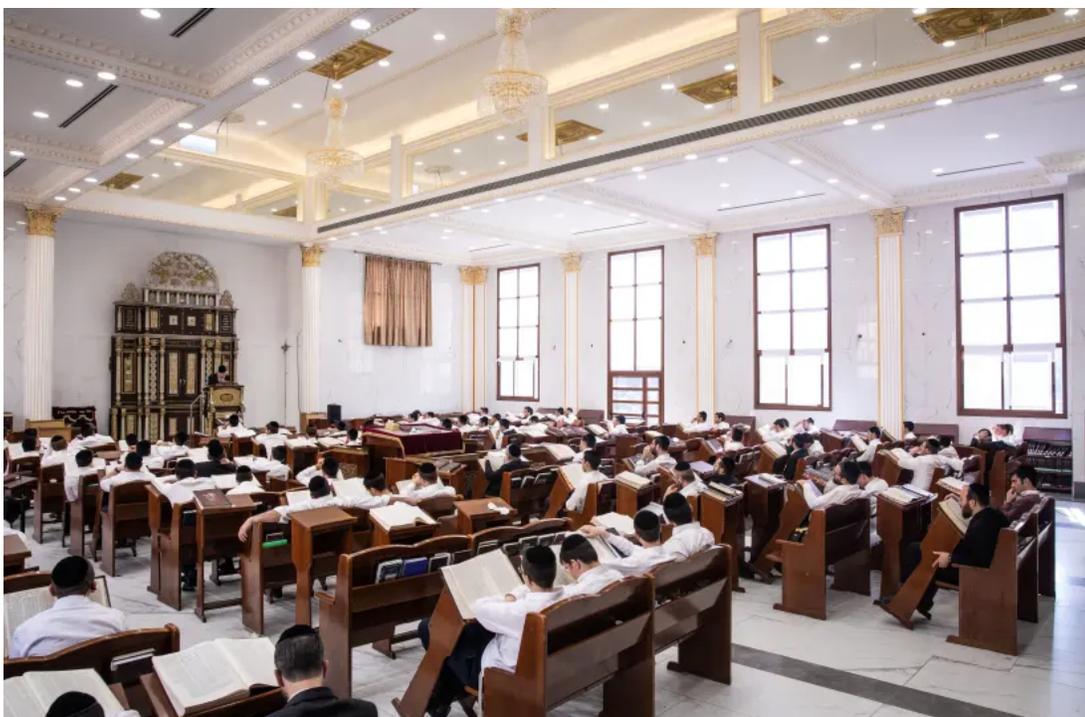
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Litzman told all ultra-Orthodox schools, yeshivas to close down

The health minister's legal adviser sent a letter on Wednesday underlining that all ultra-Orthodox educational institutions, many of which have remained open despite the coronavirus, must be closed.

By [JEREMY SHARON](#) MARCH 18, 2020 18:46



Rabbi Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi delivers a torah lesson at Ateret Yisrael Yeshiva in Jerusalem, November 19, 2019. (photo credit: AHARON KROHN/FLASH90)

In a highly unusual step, the legal adviser to the health ministry has strongly underlined to Health Minister MK Yaakov Litzman that all ultra-Orthodox educational institutions must be shut down immediately, in light of the ongoing operations of some schools and yeshivas in the sector.

Attorney Uri Shwartz who serves as the legal adviser to the health ministry which Litzman heads pointed out in a letter to the minister on Wednesday that all

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educational institutions across the country were ordered closed by the government on Sunday.

Schwartz noted that kindergartens, ultra-Orthodox elementary and high schools for both boys and girls, [yeshivas](#) and kollels (yeshivas for married men) are all included in that order.

“This order applies to all institutions regardless of the size of the institution or the number of pupils. All institutions must cease operating immediately,” wrote Schwartz to Litzman.

Schwartz, being subordinate to the minister, did not directly state that Litzman order enforcement processes against schools violating the order.

The fact that the legal adviser wrote such a letter to his minister is however an extraordinary and unusual step.

The leading ultra-Orthodox rabbis have been extremely reluctant to close educational institutions, since they overwhelmingly teach Torah and religious texts and as such are believed by the rabbis and wider community to bring metaphysical benefit to the physical wellbeing of the Jewish people.

Studying Torah is therefore seen as something which could protect the Jewish people from the spread of the current [coronavirus](#) pandemic and ceasing such studies could harm the people.

The leader rabbi of the ultra-Orthodox world Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky initially ruled last week that all educational institutions should remain open.

He and Rabbi Gershon Edelstein, another leading ultra-Orthodox rabbi, subsequently told schools and yeshivas to remain open but to reduce class sizes and maintain a two meter distance between pupils.

They have so far refrained from ordering the schools to close.

The Shas network of Sephardi elementary schools called Maayan Hinuch Hatorani did however close down, while hassidic communities have acted differently, some remaining open and some shutting down.

The radical Eda Haredit communal association of ultra-Orthodox communities decided to close all kindergartens, but has kept open the yeshivas and schools of the various communities.

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