What is a pulse oximeter?

A pulse oximeter is a device that measures the oxygen level in a person's blood. In a healthy person, the oxygen saturation level measures greater than 95 percent, but for smokers and those with chronic conditions such as lung and heart issues, the number may be lower.

What does a low oxygen level indicate?

An oxygen saturation level below 90% indicates that less oxygen is being supplied to one's vital organs, such as the lung and heart, and to all other body parts. Over time, this can cause damage to your body's cells and ultimately cause organ failure. Usually when a drop in oxygen level occurs, a person feels this lack of oxygen and shows signs of difficulty breathing or skin color changes (for example, lips or tips of fingers turning blue or purple).

Why is this important for COVID-19?

With COVID-19, patients are presenting with low oxygen levels without those physical signs and symptoms. They may have moderate or severe pneumonia before the normal signs, such as shortness of breath and chest pain, occur. Early detection of low oxygen saturation levels is key in treatment of COVID-19 and prevention of worsening of pneumonia and other COVID-19 issues.

How should I use the pulse oximeter?

Make sure your fingers are warm and dry. Place your finger in the device. It may take up to 30 seconds for your oxygen level and heart rate to be displayed. Please note: nail polish and artificial nails interfere with the pulse oximeter reading, so polish should be removed from the finger being tested. If you have artificial fingernails, use the device on your toe instead.

What does the result mean?

If your oxygen saturation level is below 95%, continue to monitor closely. If it is below 90%, contact your doctor as you may need supplemental oxygen.

The Orthodox Jewish Nurses Association is distributing pulse oximeter devices to immunocompromised and high risk community members during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the devices are being given out free of charge, donations are welcome to cover the costs. The Orthodox Jewish Nurses Association is a non-profit organization, and all donations are tax deductible. This project has been organized by Goldie Burstein RN and Linda Segel RN.

Visit www.jewishnurses.org to read more about our COVID-19 initiatives for nurses, healthcare professionals, and community members.