Dear Friends,

As you know, in recent weeks there have been rapid and significant changes in Montgomery County regarding COVID action and requirements. It's great to see the high vaccination rates and the decreasing COVID case rates. If you have not already done so, we highly encourage you to get vaccinated. **Everyone** 12 years of age and older is currently eligible and appointments are easily accessible.

As of this Friday, May 28 at 6AM, Montgomery County plans to lift all remaining COVID restrictions and will revert to State of Maryland requirements and CDC guidance. In light of this, and in consultation with our health team, here are the next steps we are taking at Ohr Kodesh, effective starting this weekend.

For **outside activities,** including events like parking lot Shabbat morning services, Shabbat morning kids' group programming, the May 31 outdoor concert, etc.:

- There will be no limits on the number of people who can attend.
- We will no longer check people in or take temperatures upon entry.
- For all events where children 11 years old and younger may be in attendance in close proximity, we ask that everyone continue to voluntarily mask. Masking when children are present, even if optional will help to continue to fulfill our responsibility to protect them until they are able to receive their vaccinations, anticipated by later in the year. Adults, by modeling good masking practice, will help our kids do the same.
- Hand sanitizer, disposable masks, and water will be available if people need (but we strongly encourage everyone to please bring your own).

For **inside activities** including events like Main Sanctuary Shabbat morning services:

- The capacity in the Main Sanctuary will be 225 people, which is approximately the number of attendees we had on a typical Shabbat pre-COVID.
- We will no longer check people in or take temperatures upon entry.
- Children and adults are able to come into and out of the Sanctuary as needed and can use the Lobby space as well.
- Masks will be required for everyone 2 years old and older, again to help with our responsibility to protect children until they are able to receive their vaccinations.
- Each household should sit such that there are at least two seats and one row between them and the next nearest households. We will have signage to assist as people enter the Sanctuary.
- We will conduct normal services, with the exception of modified *Torah Hakafot* (taking the Torah around the sanctuary), since that activity tends to encourage close proximity, handshakes and other close interactions.

Specifically related to **Shabbat morning kids' group programming**:

- Kids from either the inside service or outside service can attend together.
- There will be no maximum on size of groups.
- Advanced sign up is appreciated for planning purposes but not mandatory for attendance.
- These will be held outside in good weather and in the Social Hall if bad weather.
- Groups will be led by individuals who are vaccinated.
- Everyone present must be masked.

A few **additional** items of note:

- Registration is not required to attend services, BUT we are requesting that people continue to sign up to help with planning and logistics.
- We will continue the individually-packaged *Kiddushim* distributed jointly for both the indoor and outdoor services. We know folks have enjoyed the opportunity to schmooze outside after services.
- For any in-person school event, such as the ECC, ABRS, *Tzohar*, or Teen *Beit Midrash*, masking by everyone is required, in accordance with State of Maryland requirements.
- Synagogue committee meetings can now be scheduled inside the building at the discretion of the committee chair(s) and in coordination with Jerry Kiewe and the staff regarding timing, access, and logistics.
- As has been the case throughout, if you are experiencing any symptoms or have reason to believe you have been potentially exposed to COVID, please stay home and follow all guidance offered by your doctor and/or the CDC.

I am excited that we are able to welcome everyone back to services and programs so please plan to attend! We have missed seeing each other and we look forward to being together.

We are taking these initial steps for this new phase and will review and adjust as the situation continues to evolve and hopefully improve. As an example, we are looking at how we can best continue our daily *minyan* services and possibilities for babysitting during services. We look forward to communicating more on that and other activities soon.

On behalf of the entire congregation, I want to thank Lisa Kleppel who has been an amazing chair of our health team for many months. Lisa is stepping down with our sincere gratitude and appreciation for all that she and the health team have done on our behalf. Dr. Danielle Cherrick has volunteered to take over leading our health team efforts going forward. Thank you Lisa and Danielle!

It has been a long road and there is still some very important mileage to travel until we are fully through the pandemic. It is still very important, as we have been doing since March last year, to continue to be thoughtful and help protect each other's health.

We look forward to seeing everyone back at the Ohr Kodesh building. Please see the **ohrkodesh.org** website for services and programming times and details. If you have any questions or feedback please feel free to email me at president@ohrkodesh.org.

B'Shalom,

Seth Yoskowitz, President

Rise Ain, 1st Vice President

Rabbi Lyle Fishman

Cantor Hinda Eisen Labovitz

Jerry Kiewe, Executive Director