

8/18/2021

It is with some sadness we share with you that our congregations have made the decision to not host indoor, in-person services for this year's High Holidays. This was a decision which each of our congregations reached on their own. It is not a decision that any of us take lightly.

We know that after 18 months of pandemic we are all chafing under the burden of restrictions. So many of us have already been forced to cancel, postpone, or alter milestone events in our lives. We all thought that by the summer the case numbers would be dropping, and we would be able to move closer to normal life. But the Delta variant has upended that calculus. Delta is extremely contagious and, for the unvaccinated, is much more severe in those who contract it than the original virus. We know that most vaccinated individuals will be protected from a severe illness. Still, the risk is very real and very serious.

Of great concern is that those of us who are vaccinated can still contract Covid, have no symptoms and still pass it on to others. That means that, though we may feel safe, we put others at risk such as our children or parents when we are with them after we have gathered. While it is true that a large percentage of the Jewish community is vaccinated, in the course of our daily lives, we interact with many people. We face the same risk of contracting Covid as anyone else, and then bringing it into our community.

The Cleveland Jewish Federation has brought together medical experts who are helping guide our community's response to the pandemic. These experts have stressed to us that they believe the current surge poses significant risk that requires elevated precautions. They also believe that this surge, with such precautions, will not last as long as the previous waves. However, due to the virulence and severity of the Delta variant, we all must be especially vigilant in the meantime. With our joint communal response, we will see the light ahead of us.

When the pandemic began, we all as Rabbinic leadership stressed the supreme importance of *pikuach nefesh* – saving lives. In our tradition, *pikuach nefesh* takes priority overall. Our sages taught that if you save just one life, it is as if you have saved the entire world. No matter how weary we are of the pandemic, *pikuach nefesh* must remain our guiding principle in all that we do. We urge those who have not yet been vaccinated to do so as quickly as possible for their own sake and for the sake of others. We also urge everyone to be diligent in wearing masks whenever indoors and to practice social distancing both indoors and outdoors, in accordance with CDC guidelines. Each of our congregations has been evaluating and considering additional precautions they may choose to take. We ask that you consult with your synagogue regarding their precautions and honor any decisions the congregation makes.

We have begun the Hebrew month of Elul, during which introspection and self-scrutiny over our deeds and actions over this past year intensifies for all members of our families. When our Jewish Cleveland community reviews these days as 5782 begins, we and the congregations we serve want to be sure that we have done all we could to further the mitzvah of protecting the

lives and well-being of others. This involves hard decisions and sacrifices which we do not take lightly.

We believe that our unified Jewish community can get through this period and the upcoming second High Holy Days during the COVID-19 pandemic as we have gotten through these past eighteen months: Together.

SIGNED:

Rabbi Robert Nosanchuk, Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple

Rabbi Enid Lader, Beth Israel-The West Temple

Rabbi Steven Weiss, B'nai Jeshurun Congregation

Rabbi Steve Segar, Kol HaLev

Rabbi Joshua Skoff, Park Synagogue

Rabbi Allison Vann, Suburban Temple- Kol Ami

Rabbi Lauren Werber, Temple B'nai Abraham

Rabbi Jonathan Cohen, The Temple-Tifereth Israel