

Communication to Congregation Or Zarua October 21, 2021

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Congregation Or Zarua has focused on implementing appropriate measures to maintain the health and safety of its members and guests. The OZ Health Task Force convened on Sunday, October 17, 2021 to discuss our current policies and whether there should be any changes to ensure the health of the OZ community and its guests. On October 18, 2021, the Board of Trustees discussed and voted to approve the recommendations of the Health Task Force as outlined below.

In the last few weeks, the transmission rate of the predominant Delta variant has decreased on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, going from 89.1 new cases per 100,000 persons on August 1 to 69.2 on October 17 (<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page#transmission>).

According to the CDC, while increasing COVID-19 vaccination coverage remains the most effective means to achieve control of the pandemic, additional layered mitigation strategies are still needed in the short-term to minimize preventable illness. Vaccination alone is not controlling community spread.

Therefore, the latest CDC recommendations are that all vaccinated and unvaccinated persons wear masks in public indoor settings in high transmission areas.

Accordingly, following the CDC recommendations, the OZ Health Task Force recommended and the Board ratified that:

1. We will continue to require that everyone entering the OZ building, regardless of vaccination status, needs to stay masked at all times in the building including in the Sanctuary.
2. The only exceptions will continue to be prayer service leaders who, while on the bimah, either will wear a mask or have a negative COVID test 48 hours before the service. They will be required to wear masks when seated within the congregation.
3. We will continue the policy of not requiring members to provide proof of vaccination, or vaccination status, to enter the OZ building. Non-members will continue to be required to register for services and events and to provide their vaccination status.
4. With the warm weather, we have been able to have Kiddush on the roof. Now, as the weather gets colder, we will have Kiddush indoors in our Social Hall. Everyone is welcome to come to Kiddush. However, only those who are eligible to be vaccinated, and are vaccinated, will be allowed to remove their masks and eat. Unvaccinated members may also join the Kiddush to socialize but may not eat or remove their masks. Unvaccinated children will be allowed to eat but will be asked to stay close to their parents.
5. Those attending morning minyan may have breakfast together if all participants are vaccinated.
6. Small groups of members such as the Book Club or Bir'nana may make their own decisions about masking and vaccination status.

As always, if you think you may have any of the symptoms commonly associated with COVID-19, please remain at home.

We will continue to monitor the situation and, if transmission rates continue to fall in our neighborhood, we will consider relaxing the policy and give vaccinated persons the option to unmask in the Sanctuary, should they feel comfortable doing so.

We will continue inform you of any changes in our safety protocols.