**COVID Vaccination Update - Young Israel**

**May 14, 2021**

Dear Friends:

We have reached an extraordinary milestone in our struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic. The efficacy of the COVID vaccine has been demonstrated sufficiently to enable both the CDC and the St. Louis County DPH to fundamentally change the mask mandate under which we have been operating throughout this pandemic. This newest development now allows us to return shul operations to almost pre-pandemic norms.

The results of our informal vaccine survey have been overwhelmingly positive. Over 100 family units in the shul have responded to our survey to date, with over 99% of households that replied indicating that all adults are fully vaccinated, and those newly eligible are underway. When we consider the additional families that have not responded to the survey but have indicated to me verbally that they are vaccinated, it confirms the accuracy of that statistic across the entire membership.

Given these facts, effective as of this Shabbat, Parshat Bamidbar, one week shy of a year since reopening, we will be able to end our mask mandate for those fully vaccinated! Our new policies with regards to masks and shul operations overall, effective immediately, will be the following:

**Face-masks**

* **VACCINATED** - Fully vaccinated individuals may attend shul without the need for facemasks. Those who feel more comfortable continuing to wear the masks are welcome to do so. But the policy of the shul will align with the new CDC protocols, and not require face masks for those fully vaccinated.
* **NON-VACCINATED** - Non vaccinated individuals, including children **ages 5 and up,** must continue to wear face-masks inside the building, as before. We realize the awkward situation this creates for the kids, but we are asking for your support and cooperation for the next few weeks while this situation sorts itself out.

**Shul seating:**

* For now we plan to leave the overall structure of the shul as it is, but we hope to add additional seats to create more options for family / households.
* In recognition that there may be some individuals who are not yet comfortable with the new policy of masks-optional for those vaccinated, for the time being we will designate the men’s section in the social hall and the last two rows of the women’s section as areas in which masks should continue to be worn. **If you are removing your mask, please do not sit in these rows.**

**Aliyot / Sefer Torah / Ba’alei Tefillah**

* Starting this Shabbat, all aliyot will return to their normal routines, and we will no longer use the plexiglass barrier. Please remember that the *oleh* normally stands on the RIGHT side of the baal koreh, not the left, as we have done throughout this time.
* All Baalei Tefillah and Baalei Kriah must be fully vaccinated.

**Kiddushim**

* We will start exploring ways to return Kiddush to shul operations. Presently, as the social hall is occupied with seating, weather permitting we will host Kiddushim outside in the covered parking lot. Our first Kiddush will take place on the second day of Shavuot. (Sponsors welcome!)

**Youth Groups**

* Plans are underway to begin Shabbat youth groups as soon as we are able to engage and train a new cadre of youth group leaders. We will keep you posted.

This is an extraordinary milestone. We have reached this point due in large part to your support, your extraordinary patience, and your deep commitment to the shul and the shul community. May we continue to see success in our battle against COVID, and the return and strengthening of the shul family.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Shulman & the COVID medical advisory committee.