

RE-OPENING UPDATE

June 24, 2021

For some time, vaccines have been available for those 12 years of age and older and are medically cleared to receive them. In Massachusetts, disease rates and associated hospitalizations and deaths have dropped significantly since winter. More infectious variants, such as the Delta variant are emerging the U.S. but are not anticipated by health experts to take hold in the Northeast due to relatively high vaccination rates. The downside is that the Delta variant has been shown to be more transmissible to the unvaccinated (especially children), and with more serious disease occurring.

Our re-opening task force is comprised of healthcare professionals who have spent the last year in clinical practice and/or research. Our committee has had the safety of our community as its driving force and we have followed the science and best practices in developing our guidelines.

Although cognizant of the CDC and State guidelines, it is Shir Tikvah's responsibility to utilize our own health professional expertise to formulate guidelines that are customized for our community and protect our unvaccinated or immunocompromised community members. Our children are not yet all vaccinated and, of course, their families are appropriately concerned.

At Shir Tikvah, in order of priority, our strategy has been to develop guidelines for:

1. outdoor activities (complete and on our website),
2. indoor school activities (complete and on our website),
3. indoor lifecycle and service-related events (September, 2021), and finally,
4. all other in-person building events (late Fall, 2021).

OUTDOOR GATHERINGS

Currently, we have established guidelines for outdoor gatherings on our Shir Tikvah grounds. They are posted on our website. If you are interested in having an in-person group on our grounds, please read the guidelines and talk to our administrator, Linda Singer-Berk, if you have any questions or would like to schedule such a gathering. Our guidelines will be reviewed and revised as necessary this summer.

SCHOOL

We have developed our guidelines for "in building" Shir Tikvah school. Our Shir Tikvah Board voted to support the policy of requiring vaccination for our school staff. Our policy is as follows:

"In light of our responsibility to the children attending the school, the protection of our other employees, the protection of our families, our analysis of our obligations, including under Jewish law, and a desire to reduce risk from COVID-19, we require that all persons ages 12 and over working in our school be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 at least two weeks prior to participating."

Our School Director, Bailee, will be implementing those guidelines and policy to bring our children back together. The final guidelines and policy will be posted on our website.

2021 HIGH HOLIDAYS

A combination of factors has led us to the decision to have virtual High Holiday services this year. The holidays are early this year—early September. It is simply not safe to gather 1,000 people together indoors, even if such a place were to be available. Our clergy, ritual group, and IT Task Force has begun its work on delivering High Holiday services that fulfill our spiritual needs and begin our year with joy. Also new this year, our clergy and ritual committee volunteers will be working on processes for the creation of small in-person outdoor gatherings as a part of our High Holiday observance.

2021 BUILDING USE IN THE FALL

The re-opening task force's next task will be establishing the guidelines for Shabbat services, lifecycle, and holiday celebrations as well as other in-building activities. There will likely be new procedures to minimize health risks, including registration. These guidelines will be posted on our website as soon as they are formalized by a vote of our Board. We look forward to "in person" gatherings for services and lifecycle events beginning soon after High Holidays! These events will be accompanied by a further enhancement of our virtual experience using our newly acquired technology to provide 2-way communication possibilities!

In summary, "opening up" is not a simple matter and will require policies and guidelines that will continue to provide safeguards to our member. For the near future for indoor events, we need to consider the following: knowing who is attending (for contact tracing if necessary), assessing the maximum number of people who can gather safely, singing/chanting safety, liability issues, notification of risks, recommendations for non-participation, and options for alternative virtual access.

As part of our Shir Tikvah strategy, we will continually assess the latest guidance from CDC, the state and our own Re-opening Task Force health and safety professionals. ***During this transitional period, we will continue to maintain some controls that may exceed CDC and/or our state's requirements to ensure a safe environment for everyone, regardless of vaccination status.*** If additional risks are recognized, we will change our policies and procedures accordingly. As has been our strategy and process, we are starting cautiously with your safety as our paramount concern.

Your patience has been noteworthy and much appreciated!

Jerilyn, the Shir Tikvah Re-opening Task Force, the Board, and our clergy and staff.

PS "Getting together again" pictures needed! Please send your current pictures of Shir Tikvah in-person gatherings so that they can be part of our fall Annual Report and Chai brochure, for example, birthday or family gatherings, meetings, social events, etc. Pictures can be sent to: jerilynheinold@shir-tikvah.org