

Dear Friend,

As you know, for the last five months, our shul, in accordance with the expert guidance of our medical committee, has been holding minyanim exclusively outdoors. We have been blessed to have tents which must come down, according to town regulations, this week. Our deepest gratitude to Effie Love, Steve Myers, and Daniel Wetrin for their tireless work in procuring these tents for us. I ask that you read this update carefully regarding critical health information and shul policy.

With the expected arrival of increasingly cold temperatures in December, we will be moving **Shabbat minyanim** indoors when temperatures are under fifty degrees or there is rain. In the event that we are blessed with unseasonably warm weather on any given Shabbat (over fifty degrees), we will continue to daven outside to take advantage of the superior ventilation which outdoor air provides. **For our weekday minyanim, we will continue to daven outside unless it is actively raining.**

Moving minyan inside requires an even greater level of vigilance regarding our shul protocols due to the now established airborne transmission of Covid-19 due to aerosols. This is even more essential as we are currently experiencing a second wave of the virus, with **major increases in cases, hospitalizations, including intensive care, and, sadly, deaths.** **As such, we may shut down indoor minyanim at any time if the worsening surge makes davening indoors untenable.**

We have made major investments in our ventilation capacity as well as in our use of cleaning products designed to disinfect air spaces to ensure that we can daven indoors as safely as possible.

As we have said in the past, no one should come to minyan against the advice of their medical professional. Doing so, in my view, is categorically prohibited in the context of a pandemic. In addition, for anyone who feels any degree of discomfort or anxiety attending shul under these conditions, it is perfectly acceptable to daven at home at this time. As I have said so many times, you have my full support.

Registration for Minyan

Anyone who wishes to participate in minyan must register by cell phone to the WhatsApp group entitled JCOT minyan here <https://chat.whatsapp.com/J70pn049bAV0LL6FXA7Czd>. (This group was previously entitled Phase III. For those who were registered, there is no need to re-register) Those who daven with the sephardic minyan should register both to JCOT minyan and the Sephardic Minyan WhatsApp group here, <https://chat.whatsapp.com/DCxuX9IafKd2c4JRwVgOTL>, unless you are already registered. By registering for minyan, you agree to fully adhere to all minyan policies, engage in contact tracing, and report any testing or updates in Covid status to Rabbi Fridman.

Restrictions

Our extant policies restricting anyone from shul attendance who is a) Covid-19 positive, b) awaiting test results b) living with anyone who is Covid-19 positive, or awaiting test results c) under two week quarantine due to close exposure with someone who is Covid-19 positive d) feeling unwell in any way e) having anyone at home with a cold, diarrhea, cough, sore throat, congestion that has not been evaluated for covid with a covid test f) having traveled to any location on the restricted list in the last two weeks, in accordance with the New Jersey Department of Health g) having traveled by air to any location continue to be in full force.

There will be no exceptions to these policies, and no one, under any circumstances, may test out of a two week quarantine period. To be clear, if anyone has had a direct exposure to someone with Covid-19, a full two weeks of quarantine must be observed before returning to minyan from the last moment of exposure. As individuals with Covid-19 can be infectious for up to ten days from onset of symptoms, family members would be restricted from minyan attendance for a full twenty four days.

Children who are capable of fully adhering to the distancing expectations are welcome to join davening.

Masks and Distancing

In minyan, **everyone (including Chazzan and Ba'al Koreh) will be required to wear at least a surgical or KN-95 mask, which the shul will provide. Cloth masks will not be considered sufficient for indoor use during this second wave. We strongly recommend the use of N-95 masks for anyone who is at increased risk.** Please be in touch directly with Rabbi Fridman if you would like an N-95 mask.

We will distance **at least twelve feet** between individuals of different family pods. **There will be no singing indoors at any point, nor any food or drinks served.**

We will be continuing our practice concerning Aliyot, maintaining six feet of distance between the Oleh and Ba'al Koreh at all aliyot.

We will have permanent seating such that any tracing of cases can be done effectively and efficiently.

Use of restrooms should be restricted to emergencies.

Davening

Both the Ashkenaz and Sephardic minyan will begin with Nishmat to help minimize the exposure time.

Learning and Drashot

I will continue to offer my Rambam shiur outdoors prior to davening, unless it is raining, and will give a brief drasha outdoors following davening as well. **I will not be speaking indoors at all.**

Outside of Shul

It is important for everyone to keep in mind that there have been major breakthroughs concerning vaccine development, even if logistical challenges remain regarding distribution. Nevertheless, there is every reason to be optimistic that over the course of the next six months the threat level will be dramatically reduced. As such, halakha requires that we avoid any unnecessary risks, especially at a time when we can reasonably expect major improvements in the near future. This applies, of course, far beyond the immediate confines of shul.

We continue to daven that Hashem should watch over our community in these perilous times. Concomitantly, we commit to assuming full responsibility to do all that is within our power to preserve our health, and the health of all those around us, at this time.

Sincerely,

Daniel Fridman, Rabbi