



COVID UPDATE

March 9, 2022

Dear Shalom School families,

With the evolving COVID landscape and strong indication of progress with regard to community spread, we have some very important COVID updates to share with all of you. We write this communication with the utmost respect for our community and with the desire to create space for families' various reactions as they process this shift in school operations and COVID protocols. Please take the time to read through our various updates listed below:

VACCINE MANDATE:

As many of you have heard, there has been recent data regarding the efficacy of the Pfizer vaccine for children ages 5-11 that is both encouraging and disappointing. We can celebrate that the vaccine seems to provide significant protection against severe disease, but there appears to be limited effectiveness in preventing community spread in this age group. **As a result, after reviewing the data with our health committee at length, our Board of Trustees voted to rescind the previously passed vaccine mandate for all K-6th grade students.** Going forward, Shalom School plans to align with the State of California, which means that if and when the state mandate for vaccination of K-12 students goes into effect, Shalom School will immediately incorporate that requirement into our existing vaccine and immunization policy. In the meantime, we continue to **HIGHLY RECOMMEND** that all children who are eligible obtain vaccination.

We realize that this change in vaccine policy is difficult for many of you, as it was for all of the members of the Board of Trustees and Health Committee (many of whom are parents to children in this age group) who reviewed this data and revisited our vaccine policy. If you are interested in more information regarding how this decision was reached, please see a brief review of the available data in the bottom of this message. **Additionally, we will be available to connect in-person tomorrow morning from 7:30 am - 9:30 am in the Shalom School parking lot.** We will have a table set-up with coffee for parents where Frank Gumpert, Board of Trustees President, and Jilian Bar-or, Head of School, will be happy to talk through questions or concerns.

MASKING:

As many of you are aware, California has eliminated the state-required indoor mask mandate. As of next week, the elimination of the mandate will include school settings. Individual schools and districts are free to continue requiring masks should they so choose. **While many schools will move toward a "strongly recommended" policy starting next week, Shalom School will wait until Monday, March 28th to institute this policy if community spread remains low.** Given the newest data regarding vaccines for ages 5-11, it seems prudent to examine if large-scale unmasking increases community cases. If community spread remains low, we will move to "strongly recommended and encouraged" mask use indoors for all students on Monday, March 28th.

Faculty and staff will be required to remain masked while interacting with students indoors until further notice. Parents and visitors will be required to remain masked when indoors.

We anticipate that many children and families will choose to heed the Department of Public Health recommendation and will remain masked indoors. We will ensure that they are fully supported to do so.

GATHERING:

- **Cohorts** - Despite the disappointing news regarding vaccine efficacy, we are thrilled with the overall direction that we are taking at this point in the pandemic. Our case rates are low and we have a level of community protection from our older community members who are vaccinated as well as a great deal of native immunity for those who have had the disease. Given the low case positivity rate, we will be eliminating cohorts and allowing classes to gather together.
- **Parents on campus: Parents may now park and exit their vehicles for pick-up only effective immediately.** Curbside drop-off and morning screening will remain in place. During pick-up, parents may opt to continue to use the main parking circle or may exit their vehicles to pick up their children. We will no longer have two pick-up lines and will only use the main circle (not the circle in front of 4th - 6th grade). We ask that you only enter the school if you have specific business to take care of (ex: meeting with a teacher, dropping off paperwork, etc.) and otherwise meet your child outside. Parents will be required to wear a mask when they are inside the school building.
- **On campus activities:** We look forward to welcoming our families on campus for a variety of programs and activities. Programs that are held outdoors will be mask-optional. Indoor programming will be mask-required for all visitors.
- **Visitors:** All visitors (parents, prospective parents, contractors, etc.) will be required to wear a mask while indoors at Shalom School.

DECISION TREE:

We have incorporated some new guidance from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Sacramento Department of Public Health (SDPH) into a new and simplified version of our [Shalom School COVID Decision Tree](#). This should be easy and straight forward to follow; all individuals with symptoms of illness will be required to test and stay home until they are symptom- and fever-free for 24 hours (assuming they test negative).

We reiterate that as you digest this information, we encourage you to enter this moment with compassion for yourself, your child(ren), and our community. We welcome connecting with you one-on-one and in-person tomorrow morning (Thursday, March 10th) in the Shalom School parking lot, and we thank you for your partnership.

In community,

Jilian Bar-or
Head of School

Frank Gumpert
President, Board of Trustees

More information on the COVID vaccine for 5-11 year old children:

A recent pre-print study published out of New York State Department of Health found that vaccine efficacy against Omicron waned drastically in ages 5-11 compared to those ages 12-17 (decreasing from 68% to 12% at just 28 days after completing their 2 dose series). A larger CDC analysis shows that vaccine efficacy for both 5-11 and 12-17 wane significantly for protection against Omicron after two doses. The CDC data does not demonstrate as substantial a difference between the two groups. Meaning, both groups have relatively low protection from contracting the Omicron variant as time passes from their primary vaccination series. For older children who received a higher dose of vaccine and are also eligible for booster, a 3rd dose has been shown to work well in restoring some protection against Omicron. Unfortunately, the 5-11 year old booster trials are still underway and there is not yet word on if/when those will become available.

While this news is not what we'd hoped, the vaccine remains crucially important to protect individual children from severe disease. The vaccine still protects well against hospitalization. Additionally, there is good news coming out to suggest that children 12+ who have received their primary series are at substantially decreased risk of developing the life-threatening condition MIS-C (Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children following COVID). Hopefully, the same will be reflected in the 5-11 year old data when it becomes available.

In the future, we anticipate potentially larger doses for our younger children, boosters being approved, and even variant specific immunizations being available in years to come. We look forward to those developments and will be watching the data closely to determine how best to keep our community safe.

We, like so many of you, wanted to provide a fully vaccinated school. The goal of any vaccine mandate is to protect the others in a community. While this vaccine is certainly worthwhile at protecting the individual who receives it, the data suggests limited utility in protecting the community and for this reason, the Board of Trustees has chosen to await additional developments before mandating the vaccine ahead of the State of California.



Website

Shalom School's mission is to provide each child with an outstanding education in a nurturing environment that is academically excellent, inclusive, innovative, and inspired by Jewish values and traditions.



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