



## Letter from Reopening Committee

August 12, 2021

As announced last Shabbos, the Reopening Committee met again this week. In response to the new surge in cases locally and around the country, we felt that it was necessary to see how best we could maintain our services at YIOP while also ensuring the safety and comfort of everyone in shul. Depending on which model one uses, Oakland County is currently in the “Substantial” or even “High” level of COVID spread. We take pride in the fact that virtually every adult at YIOP is vaccinated, but studies have shown that even if the Delta variant is less concerning for those individuals, it can still be passed from person to person, despite one's immunization status. In addition to that, we have seen a rise in child infection rates from the latest wave as well, which has caused us to rethink our current policies.

After much deliberation, YIOP *strongly encourages* individuals to wear masks at shul, even if they are vaccinated. If someone is unvaccinated, however, they *must* wear a mask in shul, including children. I myself -Rabbi Katz- plan to wear a mask when we congregate together, as well. It is important to stress, however, that this time is different. We feel overwhelmingly grateful to Hashem that the vaccines have been so successful. Our community specifically has taken advantage of its availability and has reaped the benefits of loosened restrictions. Similarly now, the current urge to mask is less due to our safety individually (though that is still a concern, as many who are vaccinated have contracted the virus, as well as been hospitalized), but even more so out of our responsibility towards the community.

Because of this distinction, there is room for some flexibility, like, for instance, Baalei Tefillah, Baalei Kriyah, and speakers who may find it particularly uncomfortable to perform their roles with a mask on. We will also not be instituting any required social distancing at shul, except in those areas which are designated as such. Of course, it is always prudent to maintain distance if one can, and people should be conscientious of others who may wish to do so. At kiddush, we ask that people remove their masks only once they are seated, and somewhat separated from others.

Towards this end, the committee is looking towards the Yamim Noraim with a sense of caution, but not to the extent of what we organized last year. The shul has already sent out a letter asking for feedback from anyone who is interested in an early minyan. Similarly, if one would prefer a COVID-conscious minyan, with full masking and distancing for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur morning minyanim, please let Leonard Pollack know. We are also constantly watching the data to determine whether further modifications to our policy are necessary, in whichever direction that may be.

We will read in next week's Parsha that when one builds a new home they must make a fence around the roof so as to not “bring blood into your home” (22:8). The verse peculiarly ends “because the faller will fall from it”. Based on a Midrash (Sifrei 229:7) Rashi explains that even if Hashem might have already destined a person to fall, that doesn't give license for anyone to be the one to cause it. Let us make sure that our home, YIOP, continues to ensure the safety and health of others. We should do what we can to protect those around us, even if a danger might not affect us, ourselves (as much).

May Hashem recognize our efforts and bring this trend to an abrupt end, with health and holiness.

Rabbi Katz & The Reopening Committee