

April 2021: Temple Beth Am COVID Update

As Washington reopens and more adults in our community are vaccinated, we look forward to the day when we can welcome all of you back to Temple Beth Am! We are working very hard to plan for our reopening. Many of you have asked when and how we will reopen our doors to the community; in the spirit of transparency, we want to share as much as we can based on what we know right now. In brief, we will follow scientific guidance and reopen in phases to live our values of *pikuach nefesh* (valuing human life) and inclusion—while at the same time recognizing that we all want to be together as soon as it is safe to do so.

When we move from one book of Torah to another, it is Jewish tradition to recite "*Hazak, hazak v'nithazek/Be strong, be strong, and together we will be strengthened.*" As Rabbi Ruth has written, "It is no accident that this phrase begins with the individual—in our individual lives, when one book closes and another opens, we strengthen ourselves to face the unknown. When, as one community, we collectively face the future, we strengthen each other." In the same way, we know that as we face the return to a post-COVID world, the choices that each of us make outside of temple, matter when we show up in person together. Our health as a congregational community depends on the actions of every person.

So, what are we going to do? We will reopen in "phases" to ensure we open as quickly as we can while still remaining safe and inclusive. We do not (and cannot) know the exact timing of these shifts, but we commit to updating you regularly. Additionally, we want to emphasize that as we learn more about COVID, and the efficacy and availability of vaccines, we will modify safety protocols to ensure that we are staying safe in the least restrictive way possible. We cannot be certain when and what these changes will be, so we thank you in advance for your flexibility.

Here are the opening phases we anticipate. Below, we provide some FAQs to provide some context for how we developed this phased approach. Note, all of these phases will be implemented in a sliding fashion (not flipping a switch), opening up and including more in person opportunities as it becomes safer.

Phase One (current phase): Live-streamed Saturday morning services with B'nai Mitzvah

In phase one (our current phase), we will prioritize B'nai Mitzvahs live-streamed from the sanctuary with participants present but wearing masks at all times. We will move to a model that permits a set maximum number of guests when (i) community spread numbers decrease (rather than increase, as they are currently) and (ii) all our clergy and facilities and tech staff have been vaccinated. We anticipate permitting between 25-30 vaccinated and/or recently tested guests, including the B'nai Mitzvah families. Temple committee meetings, classes and social gatherings should remain online.

Phase Two: Outdoor gatherings without food

We anticipate that phase two will begin approximately 6 weeks after the wide availability of adult vaccinations. Phase two will include mid-sized outdoor gatherings/services, likely with social distancing and mask requirements. We do not anticipate being able to serve food and beverages. Regular services will remain online, however other small indoor lifecycle events may occur in the sanctuary. Temple staff may resume in person work to support further reopening efforts, however committee meetings, classes and social gatherings should remain online or can now be outdoors offsite.

Phase Three: Services with guests

We anticipate that phase three will include services with limited guests. Services will also be live-streamed. While we are not yet certain, we anticipate phase three will still include social distancing and masks. If safe, phase three would include some of our 5782 High Holy Day services. Phase three will also permit larger outdoor gatherings/services (weather permitting), but no food will be served.

Additionally, in phase three, Youth Learning (The Gan) and small youth or adult groups activities will gather in person with appropriate safety protocols. Regardless, online learning and connection opportunities for youth and adults will continue to be available moving forward.

Phase Four: Indoor operations resume

In phase four, Temple Beth Am will return to full indoor operations, including serving food, while adhering to the best expert health and safety advice. Again, even upon return to full in-person operations, live-streamed services and events, online learning and virtual connection opportunities for youth and adults will continue to be available.

We appreciate that this plan may seem too aggressive to some, and too conservative to others. We believe this phased approach is based in science, balances respect for our values with inclusion, and recognizes the strong desire to deepen relationships between Judaism and the community both safely and in person.

Of course, if you have questions, concerns, or thoughts, please reach out. Our Board President, Ben Glatstein, is happy to hear from you (you can reach him at **president@templebetham.org**). If you're interested, read on for more background.

Stay safe—and we look forward to seeing you in person soon!

Rabbi Ruth Zlotnick, Davida Sims, and Ben Glatstein

Frequently asked questions:

Has the Board of Directors approved this plan? The Board of Directors provided guidance on the principles we should observe for reopening. For example, the Board concluded that we must carefully observe our values *pikuach nefesh* (valuing human life) and inclusion. This is why our reopening may not be as aggressive as legally permitted.

Have you consulted with experts about reopening safely? Yes. We have worked and will continue to work with a task force of medical and scientific specialists who have advised on best practices and appropriate risks.

With schools reopening, will the Gan be in person this spring? No. Unfortunately scheduling in person classes is complex and requires longer lead times and more certainty about community spread numbers. We also still do not have enough vaccinated teachers and outdoor spaces to serve all of our students. However, we are putting maximum energy into working out these logistic challenges for the fall.

What should I do if I have questions? Please reach out to **David Sims**, Rabbi Zlotnick, or **Ben Glatstein** (our Board president).