

Changes in Shul Policies Regarding COVID

by our chaver Rav Dr. Aaron Glatt, MD

April 27, 2021 - As *Boruch Hashem* more and more people have been vaccinated, it is medically prudent to relax some of the COVID-19 preventative measures that shuls have undertaken. Such restrictions are no longer as necessary in fully vaccinated people, defined as at least two weeks after receiving the final vaccine dose required.

Loosening of restrictions will *IY"Ch* hopefully allow for more of a return to normalcy in our *shuls*, schools, camps and social activities, and further encourage people to get vaccinated.

It must be stressed that any relaxation in the guideline should be implemented **ONLY** in situations where the ***majority of the group in question are fully vaccinated and are asymptomatic***, otherwise the risk increases.

Furthermore, even fully vaccinated immunocompromised people should consult their physician about these recommendations before they consider taking part in such loosened restriction activities.

The updated CDC guidelines released today essentially state the following regarding fully vaccinated people:

1. Small, private gatherings and visits to public indoor spaces likely represent minimal risk to fully vaccinated people. Therefore, the level of precautions taken should be determined by the characteristics of the unvaccinated people present, who remain unprotected against COVID-19;
2. Outdoor visits and activities pose minimal risk to fully vaccinated people themselves or to those around them;
3. No longer need to wear a mask outdoors, except in certain crowded settings and venues;
4. Continue to take precautions in indoor public settings like wearing a well-fitted mask where the vaccination status of other people or whether they are at increased risk for severe COVID-19 is likely unknown;
5. Wear well-fitted masks when indoors with unvaccinated people from multiple households
6. Follow CDC and health department requirements and recommendations.
7. Fully vaccinated people should not visit or attend a gathering or visit public settings if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the prior 10 days or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
8. Can dine at an outdoor venue with friends from multiple households

Therefore, based upon these updated CDC guidelines and other data, my recommendations as of today ***for minyanim or social activities attended by asymptomatic fully vaccinated individuals***, with the approval of the poskim, HaRav Schachter, *shlita* and HaRav Willig, *shlita*, are as follows:

1. Attendees of outdoor minyanim may be mask-less but should ideally still distance at least 3 feet and preferably 6 feet if possible;
2. Attendees of large indoor minyanim should remain masked but can be seated at a distance of 3 feet;
3. Smaller minyanim in well sized indoor rooms can be mask-less;
4. Fully vaccinated Rabbonim can give a shiur unmasked if they are distanced from their audience;
5. Shul davening (length, singing and rituals) can return to pre-COVID-19 practices;
6. Outdoor and indoor kiddushim (*where close congregating is limited*) are something each local shul should develop guidelines for, and should incorporate safety considerations that will allow all attendees to feel comfortable;
7. All minyanim and social gatherings **MUST** adhere to local Department of Health guidelines.

I stress that individuals or shuls that are uncomfortable with any of these recommendations may choose to continue or only moderately update their current policies, as per the local rabbinical, medical and lay leadership. The local incidence of COVID-19 must also be factored in before any changes are implemented, and efforts should be made to accommodate all different levels of COVID-19 concerns in the same or alternative venues.

I must again reiterate that these recommendations are only for minyanim with **asymptomatic fully vaccinated** individuals and CANNOT be generalized to all shuls and all locations.

Finally, for shuls with both vaccinated and unvaccinated members attending, there are two suggestions:

1. Have totally separate minyanim for vaccinated and non-vaccinated members, with the former following these updated recommendations, and the unvaccinated minyanim continuing to mask and socially distance a minimum of 6 feet.
2. Consider having one minyan with discrete sections for vaccinated members separated from non-vaccinated persons, each following their appropriate guidelines.

Vaccination is essentially the reason we are at this point, *B"H*.

May *HKBH* continue to provide us with the *refuah* to this terrible *machalah*.

Kol tuv.

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