

Opening our building to more activities – with more safety precautions.

New COVID Gathering Guidelines have been adopted by the COVID Management Team (the “CMT”) which give us the infrastructure for allowing more people in the building for more purposes. Due to current Omicron concerns, the CMT has also imposed stricter indoor masking requirements. The updated Guidelines can be found [here](#) and will be posted on the Havurah website on February 1.

Background. Last month we let you know that the Steering Committee was considering a “Stage 1” Vaccination Policy recommendation from the CMT that would require those who come to Havurah for services, events, and activities to either be fully vaccinated or have a negative COVID test. It was also recommended that the policy be administered on an honor system. The article explaining that recommendation can be found [here](#).

Update. On December 14, the Steering Committee adopted the CMT’s recommendation and directed the CMT to update Havurah’s Gathering Guidelines accordingly. In addition, Steering Committee voted to require vaccine verification of Havurah staff and require that unvaccinated staff wear N95 masks while working and test weekly for COVID.

A primary goal in adopting a community and staff vaccination/testing policy was to move us towards opening the building for more services, events, and activities. We thought that a robust, early-January re-opening was feasible and desirable. We planned, and the universe laughed. Days after the Steering Committee meeting, the Omicron variant began its surge in Oregon. Instead of rushing to update and implement new Guidelines, the CMT paused and waited to see how Omicron would unfold, and we’re glad we did. The evidence of high contagion of Omicron has now led us to impose some additional requirements with respect to masking.

Summary of new Guidelines. Here is a summary of the updated Guidelines that will go into effect on February 1.

New Vaccination, Testing, and Masking Requirements:

- **Vaccination and testing.** Individuals ages five and over who are participating in an indoor Havurah event or activity must be fully vaccinated or (if medically ineligible for vaccination) have a negative COVID test.
 - A negative COVID test means a negative antigen test within 24 hours of being in the building, or a negative PCR test within 48 hours.
 - This vaccination and testing requirement is to be administered on an honor system.
 - Children ages 5 to 11 are not required to be vaccinated or tested prior to attending Shabbat School classes or Shabbat School sponsored activities. **Note:** for any *other* indoor Havurah-sponsored activity, event, or service, children ages 5 to 11 are required to be fully vaccinated or have a negative COVID test.
- **Masking.** Adults aged 18 and over must wear KN95 or N95 masks during indoor activities; individuals under the age of 18 may wear a well-fitted cloth or disposable mask.
 - Until February 25, 2022, this mandatory masking rule shall also apply to all individuals on the bima during services.
 - Masking requirements (bima and otherwise) will be reassessed in mid-February 2022 and periodically thereafter.

Note: a supply of KN95 masks have been purchased for the synagogue and will be available to those who are in the building who did not bring their own KN95 mask.

Continuation of other guidelines. Havurah will continue many of the safety guidelines that have been in place for the past several months.

- Everyone must answer “no” to COVID exposure and symptom questions
- Everyone must be masked at all times in the building
- Everyone must maintain social distancing of 6 feet between pods/people
- We will maximize air flow and circulation with ventilators, open windows, etc.
- Services in the building are to be streamed on Zoom
- Attendance sheets will be maintained in the event of a COVID exposure
- No eating indoors
- No use of kitchen by anyone but staff
- Maximum occupancy in the sanctuary and social hall is 60
- A registration/RSVP system will be established to limit/regulate the size of services and events where larger numbers might be expected

Under the new Guidelines, the building is now open for services, events, and activities. Do you really think there will be gatherings *now*? We are in the midst of an Omicron surge!

No. We don't think that there will be much action in the building over the next several weeks. However, it is important for us to establish a re-opening infrastructure that is in place and ready to go when circumstances change. These updated Guidelines give us greater flexibility around re-opening and also establish clear requirements for gathering (everyone must be fully vaccinated or tested and answer “no” to the preliminary questions) that will allow us to gather again after Omicron subsides.

Why do you have different vaccination/testing rules for 5-to-11-year-old children when they are participating in Shabbat School than you do for those same children if they are attending other events at Havurah? We are not requiring children ages 5-to-11 years of age to be vaccinated or obtain a negative COVID test prior to attending Shabbat School because we are generally following Portland Public School guidelines for Shabbat School and PPS does not require vaccination or testing of its students. Also, during Shabbat School, those children are largely *only* in contact with other students and a few parent teachers. However, when those same children come to Havurah for an event or activity that is not related to Shabbat School, it is more likely that they will be in contact with community members from older age groups who are at greater risk of serious outcomes if infected with COVID. We want all individuals over the age of five to be fully vaccinated or obtain a negative COVID test when they are gathering inter-generationally.

Adults over the age of 18 need to wear N95 or KN95 masks in the building, but what if we don't have any of those specialized masks? Havurah has purchased a supply of KN95 masks that will be available to adults entering the building who do not have their own. We ask that you please bring and wear your own KN95 or N95 mask if you have one, so that our supply can last longer.

Why not require N95 or KN95 masks for individuals under the age of 18? Standard issue KN95 and N95 masks may not effectively fit smaller faces, so we are not requiring these specialized masks for younger individuals. Of course, we would hope and expect that those younger than 18 who *can* comfortably and effectively wear a KN95 or N95 would do so.

If I am *not* fully vaccinated, I need to take an antigen test within 24 hours of being in the building or a PCR test within 48 hours. What if I don't have or can't get one of those tests? Except for the narrow Shabbat School student exception explained above, if you are over the age of five, not fully vaccinated, and cannot obtain a negative COVID test result, you may not enter the building. We encourage you to obtain a supply of tests as soon as you can, possibly starting with the free tests being offered by the federal government that you can order [here](#).

In the Preliminary Questions, I must answer "no" to the question about whether I have tested positive for COVID in the past 10 days. Why 10 days when the CDC only requires 5 days? This is one of the very few areas where we are requiring more than the CDC. While the governmental health authorities need to be mindful of the impact of their rules on economic activity, workforce availability, school-related issues, etc., we do not. It felt more prudent and appropriate to have a 10-day rule for our community. That said, the CMT is generally being very careful to not impose rules that are stricter than those recommended by the CDC or other health officials.

Everyone on the bima needs to be masked now? Even the singers, leaders, and Torah chanters? Yes. Through February 25 (the day before our next Bar Mitzvah) we are requiring everyone on the bima to be masked. We do not currently have any services in the sanctuary scheduled between now and February 25, so this may be a moot point, but we have implemented this restriction out of an abundance of caution during the current Omicron surge. The CMT will reevaluate this provision in mid-February and update service leaders and B'nei Mitzvah families as we move forward.

Why are we implementing our vaccination and testing requirements on an honor system and not insisting that people prove that they are fully vaccinated or have obtained a negative COVID test result? We addressed this concern last month in the Hineinu article about the CMT recommendation, but this is an important issue and worth revisiting.

- The logistics of implementing a verification system is likely more than we could manage right now with our current staffing shortage and the training that would be required for volunteers.
- We already know that our community is highly vaccinated (95-98% according to the poll).
- We are already trusting each other by only being together when we have answered "no" to the preliminary questions regarding symptoms and exposure.
- We are a close, intentional community where we care for each other and trust each other to make the right decisions to keep our community safe and healthy.
- The vaccination and testing requirements are being implemented on top of social-distancing expectations and stricter masking requirements. This layered approach gives us greater safety.

The COVID Management Team and the Steering Committee were in consensus on recommending an honor system. We are trying to balance protecting individual health (*pikuach nefesh*) with community values of inclusivity (*patuach l'kol*), respect (*kavod*), lovingkindness (*chesed*), and participation (*shituf*). The Steering Committee and CMT recognize the spiritual benefits of allowing for gathering again in community. This approach accepts the integrity of each individual with respect to the vaccination and testing requirements. A fundamental element of an intentional community is accepting one another's honest efforts in protecting our community's safety.

I still have questions about these new Guidelines. Who can I contact? If you have questions, comments, or concerns about any COVID policy issues, please send an email to info@havurahshalom.org. Your email will be shared with the COVID Management Team and one of the members will get back to you.

