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December 15, 2021

Dear fellow congregants:

As most of you are aware, the COVID-19 Task Force/Re-Entry Committee has been meeting at least monthly throughout the duration of the pandemic to make decisions grounded in science, safety, and Jewish values for Temple Emanu-El.

The committee met most recently on December 15, 2021. Currently, COVID-19 cases are surging in Connecticut and throughout the Northeast, and the new Omicron variant still has many unknowns. As of this afternoon, colleges and universities including Cornell, New York University, Princeton, Middlebury College in Vermont, DePaul in Chicago, and Southern New Hampshire Univ. have made the decision to cancel all nonessential gatherings on and off campus, including holiday parties and study groups. Final examinations have been moved online and classes are going all remote through the worst of the winter surge.

In the past 14 days, new cases have increased 46% nationwide and new deaths have increased by 40%. Connecticut currently has the 6th highest case rate in the nation. As of today, we have 71 new cases per 100,000 people every day in Connecticut, **which is up 196% in the past 14 days**. That translates to 2520 new cases per day in CT. We currently have 716 people hospitalized in Connecticut. Two weeks ago, on 12/1/21, we had 385 hospitalizations. One month ago, on 11/16/21, we had 243 hospitalizations. That is how quickly life-threatening cases are increasing. And our positivity rate of 7.15% indicates that we are very likely undercounting the true number of cases.

New London County is even worse. We have a case rate of 84 new cases per 100,000 people every day, or 223 new cases per day in New London County. Our hospitalizations here are up 37% in the past 2 weeks. L&M Hospital currently has 16 COVID-19 patients, Westerly has 10, and Backus has 27.

Ledge Light Health District has indicated that they anticipate this trend of sharply increasing case counts to continue through the winter holiday season.

As such, the committee has made the following decisions in the interest of the entire Temple Emanu-El community:

1. Effective immediately, in an effort to keep our congregants and staff safe, Temple Emanu-El will mandate a Covid booster shot for all those eligible to receive it in order to attend in-person services and events at Temple Emanu-El. Recipients of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines become eligible for a booster 6 months after their 2nd dose, and recipients of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine become eligible 2 months after their 1st dose. Temple Emanu-El will allow a 2-week grace period to schedule and receive the shot. After the 2 weeks have passed, entry will not be allowed until the booster is received. Please submit updated vaccination cards to the Temple office.
2. Current mask policies will remain in effect in the Temple until further notice. Masks must be worn at all times while indoors during services, programs, meetings, and social events and must cover the nose and mouth completely. As such, food will not be served indoors at this time. While this is undoubtedly disappointing to some, it is a necessary step for the safety of our most vulnerable congregants while the case rates and hospitalization rates are high.
3. As always, congregants and staff should stay home if they feel ill in any way, or if they have had direct contact with someone with COVID-19 in the last 2 weeks. If any person tests positive and has been at a Temple Emanu-El activity or in the building in the 2 weeks prior, please inform Jo-el Fernandez, Andy Parad, Rabbi Ekstrand, or Roberta Reisner-Winograd immediately.
4. These recommendations are fluid and are subject to change without notice as conditions change.

Respectfully,

Jo-el Fernandez
COVID-19 Task Force/re-Entry Committee chair and Immediate Past President

Andy Parad
Temple Emanu-El President