

Dear Congregation Beth El,

We hope this finds you healthy and doing well. We wanted to share with you upcoming changes to our COVID policies, specifically relating to masking. As you may know, several weeks ago, the CDC changed how they report community transmission rates to focusing on serious illness and hospitalization rates, rather than positivity rates. Additionally, Governor Murphy rescinded mandatory masking requirements for school districts beginning this month, and many public school districts and private schools have shifted to a mask optional policy.

Since the CDC has shifted models of how they report data, Essex County has continued to remain in the “low” level. With the BA2 variant making its way through the Northeast, and infecting many in our community, we want to ensure that Essex County continues to remain steady in the low level of transmission category. With guidance from our COVID Task Force, we want to make sure that both the CDC transmission rates in our county and the positivity rates in South Orange and Maplewood remain low for a six-week period. If it continues to remain low, then we will transition to a mask-optional policy at the end of that six-week period.

That would mean that **we intend to transition to a mask-optional policy beginning on Saturday, April 16, the first day of Passover**. All Shabbat and holiday services, programs and classes, and daily minyan would transition to being mask optional.

The Jewish Learning Center and the Thelma K. Reisman Preschool will also have a mask-optional policy following their return from Spring/Passover break. *Our Thelma K. Reisman Preschool will send out an additional email to families with further information about the Preschool's updated policies.*

We will continue to offer outdoor family services and an outdoor kiddush option, regardless of our masking policy. Additionally, we will continue to have masks available upon entering our building for those in need. Our vaccination and booster requirement for those eligible remains in effect even as we transition to a mask-optional policy. We continue to respectfully ask our community members to remain home if they are not feeling well.

Please note that if transmission and positivity rates change, we may revert back to requiring masks during those surges.

We know that there are many within our community who hold strong views about masking. For some, this transition comes with excitement, and for others, it comes with fear and trepidation. We also know that regardless of one's preference to wear a mask or not, members of our congregation care deeply about our community and each member of our community. With that in mind, we ask that everyone honor and respect each other's own personal choices and decisions regarding masking.

Thank you for continuing to do your part to keep our community healthy and safe.

Best,
Rabbi Jesse Olitzky
Rabbi Rachel Marder
Steve Zeidweg, Executive Director