

Pikuach Nefesh and COVID-19 policies for Congregation Berith Sholom: Updated June 7, 2023

Our values: Keeping each other healthy is our primary goal, balancing our Jewish values of *pikuach nefesh*, safeguarding life, and *kehillah*, community. *Pikuach nefesh* requires us to contribute to the broader community effort to end the pandemic and protect people still vulnerable to COVID-19. *Kehillah* asks us to encourage lower-risk practices for gathering in-person especially for those most vulnerable, as well as ensuring that members who cannot or choose not to join in person can still participate and connect—fully and joyfully!

Our process: Since the beginning of the pandemic, CBS has prided itself on being nimble and flexible with our COVID-19 policies. With the marking of three years since the onset of COVID-19 in the Capital Region, federal, state, and local governments revised their guidelines to reflect the relatively high levels of population immunity achieved through vaccination and natural infection.

Good science and evolving information will continue to inform our guidelines for physical community. A key resource for our guidelines will be the [New York State Department of Health \(NYSDOH\) COVID-19 policies](#) that are informed by CDC recommendations.

Decisions will be made by Rabbi Gordon, our Choir Director when appropriate, and our COVID-19 *chevra* co-led by David Gittelman and Dan Kirk-Davidoff. Decisions regarding TJCRS will be made by Rabbi, TJCRS Director, and our COVID-19 *chevra*.

Our guidelines: Federal and state guidelines are in transition. For simplicity, the following general guidelines will apply regardless of the reported CDC transmission levels, as they still reflect scientifically sound measures consistent with our values of *pikuach nefesh*:

Vaccination: We strongly encourage everyone to remain up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations, especially if attending in-person gatherings. Per CDC's guidelines, this means receiving the most recent booster (i.e., the bivalent booster) that was approved for persons as appropriate by age.

If you're ill or concerned: Stay home if you feel ill and get tested if you have any symptoms or concerns about exposure. Follow the guidance of your health provider.

Masking: The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) lifted its mask mandate in November 2022. *CBS will no longer require masking during indoor events, though we will still warmly welcome anyone to wear masks if they so choose.* Consistent with State guidance, we especially recommend masking by members of our community and their guests at high risk of severe disease and hospitalization (i.e., people who are immunocompromised and/or over 60 years of age). We will provide masks as requested.

Physical distancing: While no longer required, we will do our best to accommodate people who request seating at least six feet from others.

Maximum ventilation: As weather conditions allow, CBS will provide maximum ventilation during indoor gatherings, including opening windows in the sanctuary and keeping the attic exhaust fan running. Four portable HEPA filters are available and generally kept in classrooms or the Social Hall.

Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, weddings, and other life cycle gatherings: While the policies above apply to these events, Rabbi Gordon can discuss any special arrangements with families.

School and other small gatherings: CBS will provide policies separately, guided by this policy and the wishes of parents/participants.

Check in for contact tracing: CBS has discontinued check-in at services and other gatherings for purposes of contact tracing. CBS will only resume this practice per CDC or NYSDOH guidelines.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNs?

Anyone who has questions or concerns about these policies should contact Rabbi Gordon or Beth Hershenthart, president of the synagogue board. We're always happy to talk to you.

Best wishes for everyone's good health and safety,

Rabbi Debora S. Gordon
Beth Hershenthart, President, Board of Trustees

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