

Covid Policy Update - Q and A

December 29, 2021

- Why the change?
 - The data suggests that the time when a person is infectious following developing COVID-19 is within the first 5 days. For vaccinated people, it's likely even a shorter period. After these initial 5 days, the likelihood of infecting others drops considerably. With a negative test, that likelihood drops even further.
- Why need a test at the end?
 - Most people, on average, are infectious for five days. Some are infectious for a shorter period and some are infectious for a longer period. A rapid antigen test is effective at detecting when a person is infectious. Because we have a diverse community and we are responsible to all elements of our community, we need to take that extra step to make sure that anybody returning after being Covid-19 positive doesn't pose a risk to anybody else.
- But the CDC didn't require one?
 - There is a lot of debate as to this point and the criteria for returning after a Covid-19 positive episode. Because many people experience mild/moderate symptoms for a few days, it's often hard to determine whether they are officially asymptomatic or whether those symptoms are considered 'resolving.' To avoid any ambiguity on this point, to maintain an equal standard, and to be able to implement this policy for a large number of people, requiring a negative antigen test accomplishes all of these goals.
- Why are antigen tests suddenly acceptable?
 - The current antigen tests are effective and sensitive at determining when a person is most infectious, meaning, when they pose the greatest risk of infection to those around them. They have a rapid turnaround (about 15 minutes) and are available to do at home. In the next week or so, the federal government has said that these tests will be made available free of charge through a centralized distribution network. Details to follow.
- What if I want to do a PCR test?
 - While it may seem counterintuitive, these are less desirable at this time. A PCR test can detect whether or not there is any viral DNA in a person's nose. Not only do these take longer to provide an answer, they don't provide the answer that we are currently most interested in — is this person infectious? For this purpose, antigen tests are more sensitive. (Additionally, with the increase in prevalence of the omicron variant, some of the PCR tests are less sensitive than they were for previous variants.)
- Why did exposure rules change?
 - Data has emerged that a test to stay policy is effective in protecting the community and allows us to maximize the number of in person teaching days for the maximal number of students. These rules now apply to both unvaccinated and vaccinated people (who were vaccinated more than 6 months ago, which

includes almost our entire student population,) as the rate of infection seems to be equally distributed across both groups. That said, while serious outcomes are thankfully rare with the omicron variant, they are occurring more frequently in the unvaccinated population.

- What's the end game?
 - Save lives, prevent hospitals getting overwhelmed, keep essential things (schools) open. These protocols accomplish these goals.
- But isn't this just a cold? Why are we taking this so seriously?
 - For many people, thankfully, Covid-19 is not a very serious illness. This is even more true for those who are vaccinated. However, we are only at the beginning of this omicron surge. We hope and pray that it stays this way. However, we are already seeing healthcare services getting full and on the brink of getting overwhelmed. This means that healthcare services of all types are less available for non-Covid needs. Additionally, experience has demonstrated that hospitalizations generally increase only after a few weeks of an initial surge (i.e., they are a lagging indicator). We are watching the data and davening that this doesn't occur. However, at this point, our collective experience with Covid-19 makes cautious concern the appropriate response at this time.
- How much longer will we have to wear masks?
 - Hopefully for not much longer. One thing we have learned in the last 20 months is a healthy dose of humility. We are watching case numbers, hospitalizations, as well as utilization of hospital resources and will try to update regularly.
- What can I do to help?
 - Get vaccinated!
 - If you are eligible, get a booster.
 - Stay home if you are sick.
 - And most importantly, daven.
- What if I want to thank you for all the hard work you are putting in?
 - Send flowers, chocolates, coffee or good wishes to dlevitt@yeshivahs.org.