

Guidance Regarding COVID-19 Vaccination

*The following guidance was prepared by the
Faith and Halakhic Standards Committee of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council*

The global coronavirus pandemic has left a tragic (and still-rising) death toll and has radically disrupted our communal way of life. Meanwhile, the worldwide scientific endeavor to find solutions for COVID-19 immunity has yielded numerous vaccines in various stages of clinical trial, two of which have been proven (through rigorous testing and approval processes) to be both safe and effective. According to public health experts, ending the pandemic soonest and most safely requires that a substantial proportion of the population be vaccinated.

What does the Torah and our tradition teach regarding the obligation to be vaccinated against a virus spreading pandemically?

- Torah teaches that we are required to protect our bodies, maintain our health, and take action to avoid mortal threats: “Take utmost care and guard your lives diligently.”¹
- Torah forbids us from putting others in danger: “When you build a new house, you shall make guardrails for your roof...”² According to Maimonides, this includes a general obligation to safeguard against setting up any potentially lethal hazard.³
- Messiah Yeshua famously taught that “love your neighbor as yourself” is the second greatest commandment in the Torah.⁴ When other people’s lives are in danger, we must do what we can to save them: “Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.”⁵
- When an illness has a proven remedy (*refuah bedukah*), we have an obligation to accept it. A person may not refuse medical intervention if their life is in danger and there is a treating physician who can save them.⁶
- *Pikuach nefesh* (the halakhic mandate to save a life in danger) supersedes virtually all other commandments, demonstrating the high value that Judaism places on preserving human life.⁷

In light of the above, as well as the established scientific consensus on the effectiveness of vaccines to prevent outbreaks, contemporary decisors rule that halakha encourages and even obligates eligible Jews to be vaccinated against COVID-19.⁸ In the current health crisis, getting a COVID-19 vaccine is a crucial

¹ Deuteronomy 4:9,15; c.f. *B'rakhot* 32b

² Deuteronomy 22:8

³ Mishneh Torah, *Hilchot Rotzeach* 11:4

⁴ Mark 12:31, quoting Leviticus 19:18

⁵ Leviticus 19:16; c.f. *Sanhedrin* 73a

⁶ Rabbi Jacob Emden, *Mor u-Ketzi'ah, Orach Hayim* 328

⁷ In the halakhic system, a life-threatening circumstance justifies overriding Shabbat (*Yoma* 85a-b), Yom Kippur (*Yoma* 82a), kashrut (*Yoma* 83a), and any other negative commandment in the Torah, with only three exceptions: worship of idols, incest, and bloodshed (*Ketubot* 19a; *Sanhedrin* 74a).

⁸ Additional statements and responsa pertaining to COVID-19 vaccinations include: the Orthodox Union / Rabbinical Council of America’s “COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance” (December 15, 2020)

<https://www.ou.org/covid19/>; from the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative Judaism), Rabbi Micah Peltz’s “Vaccination and Ethical Questions Posed by COVID-19 Vaccines” (January 1, 2021)

<https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Vaccination%20and%20Ethical%20Questions%20posed%20by%20COVID-19%20Vaccines%20-%20Final.pdf> and Rabbi David Golinkin’s “Does halakha require

way of showing love and regard for our neighbor.

Additional halakhic considerations regarding vaccination include:

- **Non-kosher ingredients:** Consistent with MJRC Standards decision 3.6 (permitting consumption of medicines derived from non-kosher ingredients in capsule or elixir form), medicines containing such ingredients would also be halakhically permissible when administered through injection, nasal spray, etc.
- **Ethical concerns regarding cell lines from aborted fetal tissue:** Contemporary Orthodox Jewish halakhic authorities draw a distinction between deriving benefit from such tissue (which is permitted) and colluding in its original procurement (which may be problematic).⁹ It is also important to note that not all vaccines are created from fetal cell lines.¹⁰

We strongly recommend:

1. Medical questions and concerns about COVID-19 vaccination should be addressed in consultation with one's personal physician, a licensed medical doctor, whose recommendations should be followed.
2. During the pandemic, individuals whose doctor recommends vaccination against COVID-19 should see themselves as having an ethical and religious responsibility to be vaccinated, based on the Torah's teachings concerning the preservation of life and Yeshua's emphasis on love for neighbor.
3. We should continue following government health guidelines¹¹ and local health official recommendations regarding COVID-19 vaccination and safety.¹² We also commend the practices of social distancing, wearing of masks, and frequent handwashing to mitigate the spread of infections.

vaccination against dangerous diseases such as measles, rubella, polio and Covid-19?" (January 5, 2021) <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Golinkin%20vaccination%20final.pdf>; the Union of Reform Judaism's "Special Covid-19 Message" (January 8, 2021) <https://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/a-special-covid-19-message-from-reform-judaism-january-2020/> and "Resolution on Mandatory Immunization Laws" (January 10, 2015) <https://urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/resolution-mandatory-immunization-laws>

⁹ See Rabbi Dr. J. D Bleich in *Contemporary Halachic Issues*, vol. 4, chapter 10 "Utilization of Scientific Data Obtained Through Immoral Experimentation." Christian groups with strong ethical and religious objections to the practice of abortion have also judged the vaccines currently available to be ethically permissible; see the Vatican's [Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines](#) as well as [statements by ethicist Dr. Jeffrey Barrows](#), senior vice president of bioethics and public policy for the Christian Medical and Dental Associations.

¹⁰ This includes the two mRNA vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna currently approved in the United States and Israel, which are synthetically created. See <https://factcheckni.org/articles/covid-19-vaccines-and-aborted-fetuses/>

¹¹ E.g. U.S. CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>, State of Israel Ministry of Health <https://govextra.gov.il/ministry-of-health/corona/corona-virus-en/>

¹² This exhortation is based on the halakhic principle of *dina d'malchuta dina*, "The law of the king is law," which refers to the law and authority of secular governments and their authority.