

Associated's COVID-19 Vaccination Town Hall Meeting for the Orthodox Jewish Community, follow-up questions.

10/20/21: An email was sent out to the community which stated the following:

On Sunday night, October 24th at 7:30pm, the Baltimore City Health Department and The Associated will host a **live virtual Town Hall meeting** with the Orthodox Jewish community about COVID-19 vaccination. You've got questions and concerns, let's bring those to the table and hear answers from experts and community leaders. The panel of presenters will include Rabbi Jonathan Seidemann, Dr. Kendra McDow, Dr. Naor Bar Zeev, Dr. Susan Lipton, and Councilman Yitzzy Schleifer, and will be moderated by Laura Kurcfeld - VALUE Baltimore's Vaccine Coordinator for our community. We will cover all of the topics on people's minds relating to COVID-19 vaccination – breakthrough cases, kids and teens vaccination, fertility concerns, myocarditis, boosters, DNA, and more!

The email continues with the following statement:

Questions are highly encouraged to be submitted in advance online to bit.ly/questionscovid19.

Later that day, I submitted the following question to the panel. I also submitted an additional question, but this is the only one they addressed at the meeting:

As Orthodox Jews, we are supposed to follow the guidance of the Shulchan Aruch. In O.C. 618:4, we are told that if 2 doctors say there is a danger, we are required to follow their advice even if 100 doctors disagree. The general rule is that the phrase "even 100" really means "even 1,000". But even if you want to say that it is strictly 100, at least 2% of doctors are against giving the covid vaccine to children and teens due to minor side effects such as heart inflammation, blood clots, and death, and due to the fact that it is completely unnecessary to vaccinate them. (Tens of thousands of doctors are also against the covid vaccine for adults.) Do any of the experts on this panel say that covid is dangerous for perfectly healthy children and teens? If yes, please provide a source. If no, why are we ignoring the Shulchan Aruch? Perhaps you will argue they need to vaccinate to protect grandma. A. The vast majority of literature (including a statement from the CDC Director) indicates that if anything, you are putting grandma in GREATER danger by removing the child's symptoms, while most likely NOT preventing transmission. B. Even if you come up with a "study" showing that it does offer some protection from transmission (against the vast majority of literature), Shulchan Aruch (C.M. 426) is clear that it would still be forbidden. Pischei Teshuva (426:2) quotes a dispute whether it would be permissible to put oneself in possible danger to save someone else. But they only disagree where the other person is definitely in danger. But when the other person is only in "possible" danger, everyone agrees it is forbidden to put yourself in possible danger. The only way to justify vaccinating children and teens would be to say that if they are not vaccinated, people around them will DEFINITELY die, AND that by taking the vaccine, those people will DEFINITELY be saved. That is a huge stretch to say the least, and even then, it would still be a dispute whether or not it would be permissible to vaccinate.

The 2nd speaker in the panel addressed part of this question. The video of the full town hall meeting was posted on baltimorejewishlife.com on 10/27/21. You can also find the video on youtube at: <https://youtu.be/XvtABIK7YrA>

The following is an email conversation between myself and Laura Kurcfeld, the moderator.

10/25/21: I wrote:

I missed the zoom meeting. Did they answer my questions?

10/26/21, 9:01am: Mrs. Kurcfeld responded:

HI -----,

Sorry I didn't get a chance to respond yesterday. I actually did include one of your questions and had Rabbi Seidemann respond to it. I will be posting the recording link once I get it.

Thanks for the meeting link.

All the best,
Laura

10/26/21, 9:46am: I wrote:

Great. Can you please email me a copy of both of my questions? Which one did you use? How many questions were submitted?

Thank you

10/26/21, 10:47am: Mrs. Kurcfeld responded:

I'll send you a link to the recording when I get it. That will give you the most complete information. Thank you for submitting questions. We of course did not have time to get to all the questions unfortunately but did the best we could.

Have a great day!

10/27/21, 6:47pm: I wrote:

Please email me a copy of my questions.

Did you forward the question to him exactly as I wrote it?

10/28/21, 7:38pm: Mrs. Kurcfeld responded:

HI -----,

I'm on vacation and could not answer your calls today.
Here is the link to the recording of the Town Hall: ...

Below are the questions you sent me. {see above, page 1}

10/28/21, 7:46pm: I wrote:

Thank you. Sorry to bother you on your vacation. I'm assuming you forwarded the entire question to Rabbi Seidemann exactly as I wrote it?

10/28/21, 7:52pm: Mrs. Kurcfeld responded:

Yes, he saw your entire question. When you listen to the recording you will hear what I needed to ask for the sake of time.

10/29/21, 9:27am: I wrote a follow-up question. For the most part, there is nothing new. It is just repeating and clarifying that which I submitted in my original question.

Mrs. Kurcfeld,

Thank you for sending my question to Rabbi Seidemann. I have a few follow up questions. He can feel free to respond to me directly:

First, I want to clarify my question. When Rabbi Seidemann repeated my question, saying that there might be 2% of doctors who are "nervous about the vaccine", I believe he mischaracterized their position when he quoted them as saying (12:25) "it's too short of a time table, it's untested, no vaccine has ever been brought to market in such a short time frame." The position of tens of thousands of medical experts around the world is not simply that they are nervous because it's rushed and untested, and who knows what affects the vaccine will cause. 16,000 people are dead in the US alone. There is no dispute as to whether or not those people are dead. The only dispute is, did all 16,000 people coincidentally die within hours of the vaccine, or were the deaths a direct result of the vaccine? There might also be a category of doctors who are unsure if it was a coincidence or a direct cause. But I am referring to the tens of thousands of experts around the world who are confident that it was a direct cause. They are NOT saying "who knows, maybe it can cause death?" They are saying "this vaccine is killing people". Also, as I explained in my question, I don't think you need 2%. You would only need 0.2%. And as I explained, I am primarily asking about children and teenagers. I have spoken to local doctors who are specifically against vaccinating children and teenagers. Also, most people agree that the government reporting system which shows the 16k deaths, is underreported and very inaccurate. According to a Harvard study, only 1% of adverse events are reported. The most conservative estimate I have heard is 10%. That means at a minimum, you have to multiply the results by 10. There are also hundreds of thousands of permanent injuries reported as a result of the vaccine. The high school athletes who turned into vegetables within minutes of taking the vaccine, are definitely vegetables. There's no question about it. The only question is, were they all a coincidence? According to tens of thousands of medical experts around the world, it is no coincidence.

Rabbi Seidemann answered my question by saying: "it's just the opposite. If a person cares about saving lives, then he really doesn't have an option but to follow the majority who say that this is what a person must do to save lives, and certainly to save his own life."

Please provide me with the name of a single physician on the planet who asserts that **healthy** 5-12 year olds are at high risk of death from covid-19. You say that according to Jewish code of law, we have "no option but to follow the majority...to save his own life". If you have the majority, it shouldn't be difficult to find one doctor who maintains that position. Around 50 healthy children have died from covid. But you also had 50 people who died from being struck by lightning. Keep in mind, the only information we want from the expert is the number of deaths, not their opinion on how afraid we should be. If an expert tells us that 50 people were struck by lightning last year, and therefore we all need to be terrified and never leave our homes, would you comply? We can believe the expert on the number of fatalities, but we should ignore the "expert" advice that we all need to live in fear. I would like you to provide the name of a doctor who says that thousands of perfectly healthy children died from covid. Not an expert who says that 50 children died, and therefore it is a deadly disease. If you are using או"ח ס' תריח to require us to vaccinate our children, stating that their life is in danger while unvaccinated, I would like to know which doctor gave you that information.

You also assert that we must vaccinate because according to the majority, "this is what a person must do to save lives, and certainly to save his own life." When you say "to save lives", you are clearly referring to other people's lives. In other words, I must vaccinate my child to save other people from dying. As I explained in my question, this is wrong on numerous accounts: 1. According to the CDC Director, as well as all the literature, vaccines **can't** stop infection and transmission. Therefore, not only are you not saving anyone's life, you are putting them in greater danger. Since the vaccine allegedly lowers or blocks the symptoms, you could be spreading the disease without even knowing it. Had you not vaccinated, you would have gotten a small cough, stayed home, and not infected everyone else. 2. Even if you somehow make the argument that vaccinating yourself will save other people's lives, it would be forbidden according to Shulchan Aruch. See my original question for the exact source. One must not enter even a possibly dangerous situation in order to save someone else from a possible danger.

Thank you in advance for your prompt reply on this very urgent matter.

11/1/21, 12:42pm: I had not received any response, so I sent another follow-up email:

Good afternoon,

Did you forward my email to Rabbi Seidemann? Please ask him when I should expect a response.

I would also like to add some information to my previous email. Here are a few sources supporting what I said, that a more accurate ratio should be 0.2%, instead of 2%.

תוס' ב"ב דף כג. ד"ה והתניא, יד רמה ב"ב דף קמו. ד"ה והא

I thought I remember seeing a more explicit source, but I was unable to find it.

Here is another important factor to keep in mind. The Gemara we are discussing is talking about two doctors who thoroughly examined the patient, and both came to the conclusion that fasting could lead to a סכנת נפשות. One hundred doctors also conducted a thorough examination of the patient, and each of them came to the opposite conclusion, that there was no risk. Normally we follow רוב דעות, the majority opinion. But this is an exception to the rule.

This discussion only begins when you are dealing with דעות, expert opinions. Each doctor examined the patient and based on his/her findings, came to an expert assessment of the situation. But what would you say in the following case? 2 doctors who examined the patient said there is a risk. 10 doctors examined the patient and concluded that there is no risk. And one million doctors who never examined the patient, and don't even know any details about the patient, tell us that they trust the 10 doctors who said there is no risk. Do each of those million doctors count as a separate דעה? Is it 2 vs 10, or is it 2 vs 1,000,010?

I think it is obviously 2 vs 10. That doesn't mean the million doctors' opinion is worthless. It is a valid opinion. It just has no direct relevance to the discussion of whether or not this particular patient is at risk. Their opinion is only relevant if you want to determine if the 10 doctors are competent. Regardless if the 10 doctors are competent or not, the patient may not eat since we are concerned that the 2 doctors might be correct. Even if it is true that the 10 doctors are MORE competent than the 2 doctors, we still listen to the 2 doctors.

רמ"א או"ח ס' תריח סע' ב שער הציון ס"ק יא

But what would you say if all million doctors who said that the 10 doctors are competent, would lose their license and get fired from their jobs if they said otherwise? And what would you say if the 10 doctors were caught lying on numerous occasions over the last 2 years? Please show me where it says in Shulchan Aruch that we must follow the advice of liars? I don't see how anyone can make the argument that the 10 doctors are in fact more credible than the 2. But like I said, even if you argue that they are more credible, it is irrelevant.

11/4/21, 2:06pm: I did not receive any response. I also tried calling Mrs. Kurcfeld a few times on her direct line, but she never answered the call and she never called me back, so I sent the following email:

I would appreciate a response.

11/8/21, 3:00pm: It has been 11 days since the last time I heard from Mrs. Kurcfeld. I sent her and Rabbi Seidemann the following email:

Mrs. Kurcfeld and Rabbi Seidemann,

Someone recently asked me the following question: There are many doctors and many rabbis who say that we should get vaccinated. There are also many doctors and many rabbis who say we shouldn't. How do we know who we should listen to?

It's a good question. It can be confusing to know what is the correct thing to do. A Bais Din in America recently convened, heard hours of testimony from experts, and ruled that it is forbidden, under any circumstance, to give the vaccine to children and teenagers. A different Bais Din in Israel issued a similar ruling. But there are many rabbis who say that everyone is obligated to get the vaccine according to הלכה. How are we supposed to know who to listen to?

I responded that it is extremely simple to determine who we should listen to: Every rabbi and every doctor in the world (all tens of thousands of them) who are either partially or fully against the vaccine, if you were to approach them with questions, whether you agree with them or you are trying to challenge

them, they will give you all the time in the day and they will give you a very thorough response. If you have a follow-up question, no problem. They will take hours out of their busy day to give you all the answers you want.

In contrast, if you approach any rabbi or any doctor who is in favor of the vaccine, 99.9% of the time they will refuse to talk to you if they sense that you might not be fully supportive of their views. If you're lucky, you may get a brief irrelevant response, but most of the time they will either ignore you or call security.

It makes absolutely no sense to follow the advice of people who refuse to support and validate their own opinion. On a rare occasion, such as the recent town hall event, you will have a few rabbis and doctors who claim they would like to answer our questions. You claim you want to address the concerns of those who are hesitant to take the vaccine. However, the one question of mine that you responded to was a non-answer. You ignored 3/4 of what I submitted. I am aware of the answer that people have given, that since most doctors say it is a סכנה if you don't vaccinate, we should revert to the standard rules of following the majority. That's why I asked if you have any medical source to support that claim. I am aware of the answer that we have to protect grandma. That's why I asked if you have any source in הלכה to support that statement. But you just went ahead with the typical bumper sticker response, a complete non-answer. What did you think you were trying to accomplish by ignoring 3/4 of my question?

THIS IS EXACTLY WHY WE ARE HESITANT. Because you refuse to substantiate your views, and you refuse to answer our questions. Furthermore, it is a tremendous חילול ה' to publicly twist the תורה to say something it does not, and to make it look like your personal views are based on הלכה, when they are not. I am not expecting either of you to agree with me, and to risk getting fired from your positions. But to make a public statement, twisting and misrepresenting the words of the תורה, is unacceptable.

11/9/21, 4:20pm: The next day, Rabbi Seidemann responded to me, and cc'd Mrs. Kurcfeld:

Dear -----,

Mrs. Kurcfeld forwarded me your question re the Covid vaccines for children ages 5 to 12. I had never addressed that part of it in any forums . Everything I said was regarding adults . When it comes to children it is a completely different calculus as far as what we currently know , and that is a question that each parent may analyze with the Pediatrician whom they trust and have experience with .

The Vaad HaRobbonim has never addressed nor issued any statement one way or the other regarding the 5 to 12 age group.

We have until now been encouraging adults to get vaccinated.

Rabbi Jonathan Aryeh Seidemann
Kehilath B'nai Torah Congregation
6301 Green Meadow Parkway
Baltimore, Maryland 21209

11/9/21, 4:22pm: I asked:

What about teenagers?

11/9/21, 4:29pm: Rabbi Seideman responded:

It seems the local general communal Rabbinic perspective has been to treat them as adults regarding this , and it seems that the local pediatricians by and large have this perspective, and my understanding is that the local Yeshivos have come to that conclusion as well, however, presumably, as long as the child still is young enough for pediatric care , then that can be a conversation and analysis to have with one's pediatrician.

11/10/21, 12:23am: I said:

Thank you for your response.

Mrs. Kurcfeld informed me that she forwarded you my original question in its entirety, where I specified three times that I was specifically referring to "children and teens". Therefore, when you addressed my question during the zoom meeting, I took the liberty to assume you were referring to children and teens. But thank you for clarifying that you had "never addressed" children's covid vaccines in any forum, and that everything you said was regarding adults.

To clarify, the Vaad HaRobbonim has been "encouraging adults to get vaccinated". But when it comes to children, although the FDA voted 17-0 to approve the vaccine for children, and although the CDC "recommends **everyone ages 5 and older get a covid-19 vaccine** to help protect against covid-19", you are telling me that the Baltimore Vaad HaRobbonim is NOT encouraging parents to vaccinate their children against covid-19, at least through age 11, and possibly until age 17 ("as long as the child still is young enough for pediatric care"). Rather, each parent should have a conversation with the pediatrician whom they trust. Is that correct? I am curious to know why the Vaad HaRobbonim rejects the advice established by the medical community, as outlined by the CDC. If it is because you do not trust the FDA and the CDC, I completely understand.

To clarify further, I have a few children between ages 5 and 17. I had spoken at length with the pediatrician whom I trust, and I was instructed that under no circumstance should I give my children the covid vaccine. Are you saying it is the official position of the Vaad HaRobbonim that in my specific case, as well as anyone in a similar situation, that we should NOT vaccinate our children for covid-19?

Also, what about **perfectly healthy** 18 or 20 year olds? You are telling me that their lives are in danger if they don't get vaccinated, according to the majority of doctors. As I requested previously, please provide me with the name of the doctor who gave you this information.

Thank you

11/10/21, 4:23am: Rabbi Seidemann responded:

I am saddened that you insist on taking my words out of context, and it is probably better if we just allow this to be the last correspondence on this matter, as whatever I respond apparently you will twist to your preference.

The Vaad HaRobonim has not made any recommendation re children; we didn't "vote" to "reject" FDA / CDC, we didn't vote to accept, we simply have not gotten involved in it. Please don't spend your time and mine spinning imaginary conspiracies and stating things in ways I didn't say.

If you have an approach regarding Covid vaccines which you are following, you are going to do whatever you are going to do regardless. Please don't harass Robbonim and others who see things differently than you.

11/10/21, 4:37pm: I said:

I received an email on October 20th informing me of the Associated's COVID-19 Vaccination Town Hall Meeting for the Orthodox Jewish Community, taking place on Oct 24th, moderated by Laura Kurcfield. The email stated that "questions are highly encouraged to be submitted in advance". I never approached you. YOU solicited ME. You even "encouraged" me to submit my question, which I did. I am simply asking you to clarify your answer, and you respond by asking me to stop harassing you. Unbelievable.

THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT. Without exception, every time a rabbi or doctor in favor of the vaccine is questioned by someone who might not agree with them, the most you will get out of them is a bumper-sticker response. The minute you try to go into the slightest amount of detail, the conversation is over. Many people in the community want to know who they should listen to. What they need to understand is that it makes absolutely no sense to follow the advice of those who refuse to explain themselves or answer any questions. If you would like us to follow your advice, which I assume you do, continuing with the same pattern is counterproductive.

The question I submitted was clearly addressing vaccination for "children and teens". I assumed, therefore, that you were responding to my question. You then informed me that "everything you said was regarding adults". And that's fine. That's why we are having a conversation, so that I can better understand your position. There's no need to get sad or make accusations about "spinning imaginary conspiracies", whatever that means.

You said regarding children, "that is a question that each parent may analyze with the Pediatrician whom they trust". Then you said "The Vaad HaRobbonim has never addressed nor issued any statement one way or the other regarding the 5 to 12 age group." I assumed, therefore, that the first statement was the current advice that the Vaad HaRobbonim was giving parents. As you explained in the next email, they did not vote to reject or accept. But למעשה, what should parents do right now? I think it was a perfectly reasonable interpretation of your words that the first statement, that each parent should "analyze with the Pediatrician whom they trust", is what the Vaad is currently recommending. Now you inform me that I misunderstood your words. Please forgive me. But again, there's no need to be sad.

We now know that the statement, "each parent may analyze with the Pediatrician whom they trust", was NOT the official advice of the Vaad HaRobonim. Then whose advice was it? Can I assume that it

was YOUR advice? In that case, let me reword my statement: although the FDA voted 17-0 to approve the vaccine for children, and although the CDC "recommends **everyone ages 5 and older get a covid-19 vaccine** to help protect against covid-19", you, Rabbi Jonathan Aryeh Seidemann, do not, as of today's date of 11/10/2021, accept the advice of the FDA and CDC. Had you accepted their advice, you would have told me to vaccinate my children. But alas, you have NOT advised me to vaccinate my children. Rather, you advised me to "analyze with the Pediatrician whom I trust". I then informed you that the pediatrician whom I trust has instructed me not to vaccinate my children. In effect, your advice to me today is that I should not vaccinate my children. Correct?

You said "If you have an approach regarding Covid vaccines which you are following, you are going to do whatever you are going to do regardless." First of all, I DID follow your advice regarding children, as described above. Also, you refuse to answer most of my questions. That's the main reason it would be foolish for anyone to follow your advice in general. But if you would be more forthcoming and provide complete answers and explanations, I very well might take all of your advice. For example, you said that 18-20 year olds are required to vaccinate according to Shulchan Aruch since the majority of doctors say that their lives are in danger if they don't vaccinate. I asked you for the name of even one doctor who said that, but you refused to respond. I asked you for a basis in Halacha that an 18-20 year old is required to vaccinate to protect others. But you refused to respond. I asked if there are any doctors who say that children's lives are in danger if they don't vaccinate. I understand that "the Vaad HaRobonim has not made any recommendation re children", and that they have not voted one way or the other. I am asking you, Rabbi Jonathan Aryeh Seidemann, is there any reason we should ignore the explicit ruling of the Shulchan Aruch? Again, you refused to respond.

Should you choose to respond to my questions, I would be more than happy to continue this very important and productive conversation. But please let me know either way. There are many people in the community who would like to know if you have anything substantive to convey in response to my questions, and I don't want to keep them waiting.

Thank you

11/10/21, 4:52pm: Mrs. Kurcfeld piped in:

Hi -----,

With all due respect, you have crossed the line into harassing Rabbi Seidemann, and I need to ask you to please stop.

You sent in your question to the Town Hall, and as noted in the event's information, we did our best to present questions that could best be addressed within the time constraints we had. I have since then been very busy and apologize for not being able to address your emails from last week. I was going to send your full question to Rabbi Seidemann yesterday for him to get back to you and address in full, when you sent an email to both of us. I asked Rabbi Seidemann to respond to your original questions. Rabbi Seidemann did so, and went beyond that answering your next question as well. Since his first response you have engaged in a combative dialogue. I wish we were able to respond in a way that satisfies you more, and acknowledge that we are unable to do so. At this point we will not be responding to your questions on this matter further.

If Rabbi Seidemann wishes to add anything to this, he is surely welcome to do so. If I may be so bold, I will speak on behalf of both of us and wish you well as you navigate through your concerns about the vaccines and the Rabbis' approach to communicating about them.

All the best,
Laura

11/10/21, 9:00pm: I concluded:

As they say, Laura, if you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen.

You never learned in Yeshiva, but this is what it's supposed to look like. מלחמתה של תורה. It's a war zone. This is the only way to get to the truth. But I assure you, it's nothing personal.

These are life and death questions. Frankly, I don't have time to "navigate through my concerns". I want answers.

It is perfectly clear to anyone reading this conversation that the question which I submitted, as well as any subsequent questions, were not answered. Had you or the rabbi told me that you can't answer my question, that would have been fine. But to pretend to answer my question, especially to claim that your ideology has a basis in הלכה when in fact it does not, is unacceptable.

I asked you on Oct 27th and again on Oct 28th if you forwarded my question in its entirety to the rabbi. On Oct 28th you responded "Yes, he saw your entire question". Through his own admission, he did not respond to my question. He had plenty of opportunities to respond, but he refused.

Thank you for your efforts. I think we accomplished a lot. This is further proof that those who support the vaccine will never be willing to substantiate their position. Ask any of the doctors you know if they are willing to enter into an open public debate. I will pay you \$1,000 if you can find even one expert. I can probably offer you \$100,000, because I know you won't be able to find anyone. In contrast, give me 30 minutes, and I'll find you 30 medical experts to argue against the vaccine who will show up to a public debate, any time, any place. Is it a coincidence? Of course not. The science is against the vaccine. The statistics, the math, the logic, *everything* is against the vaccine. The vaccine is nothing more than a religious belief with absolutely no basis in logic, and certainly no basis in הלכה.

Case closed.

Have a good night.