

**Remarks for Press Conference with Governor Lamont
Re: Religious Exemptions for Vaccinations ~ CT State Capitol 9/16/19**

I'm honored to speak here this morning, not as a scientist, but as a religious leader who respects the work of scientists and the preponderance of scientific evidence in the matter of vaccines. I speak for myself and on behalf of the overwhelming majority of my community. Many of my congregants are involved in health care or work in schools. My own husband is a nurse. I speak as a rabbi and a mother and as someone who is knowledgeable in Jewish law.

One of the most basic principles of Jewish law is *pikuach nefesh*, the primacy of saving a life. The life of a human being is considered of inestimable value and therefore nearly any other rule can be abrogated to preserve it. The ancient Sages taught: "Whoever saves a single life is considered to have saved an entire world." The exact same sentiment is found in the *Qur'an*.

Vaccines have been proven safe and reliable. They prevent or lessen the severity of many terrible childhood diseases. As a six-year old, I nearly died from a case of measles encephalitis. I was lucky and I recovered. There are children with compromised immune systems and other medical conditions which prevent them from receiving vaccinations. They are reliant on "herd immunity." In such circumstances, Jewish law is clear: Those who are healthy must get vaccinated. They have a responsibility to do so, based on the principle "*Al tifrosh min ha-tzibur* - You may not separate yourself from the community." You may not endanger those who are vulnerable.

While there may be Jewish parents who choose not to vaccinate their children, there is no basis for that decision in Jewish law. On the contrary, our tradition emphasizes the importance of preventive medicine, the preciousness of life, the importance of caring for one's body and not causing any possible harm to others. Thank you.