

GUIDELINES: HOW MUCH MUST WE GIVE UP TO SAVE LIVES?

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A Jewish legal and ethical perspective offers the following guidelines for individuals, community leaders and governments looking to approach risk responsibly during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Preserving life is a paramount value in Jewish tradition.** We are required to forgo even our deepest commitments and endure inconvenience as individuals and as a body politic to keep ourselves and the masses safe and healthy.
- **Risk is an inherent part of life, and individuals are entitled to take reasonable risks.** What is considered reasonable, however, should itself be framed strongly by the value of life.
- **Our individual and communal fates are inextricably intertwined.** Individuals who choose to undertake personal risk are also impacting the health prospects of everyone around them.
- **Governments and community leadership have a responsibility to steer communal norms** toward protecting each other's life and health, normalizing public health precautions, such as masking and avoiding in-person, dense physical interaction to benefit the population as a whole and especially less privileged populations who are by definition more vulnerable.
- **Financial concerns hold halakhic weight, but so do matters of the spirit.** Honoring the elderly, education and rest are forms of communal wealth.
- **The only economic interest that justifies risking lives is preventing poverty.** To the extent that restrictions are loosened, they should be loosened for the sake of preventing the most economically vulnerable people in the community from sinking into dangerous poverty, including food and home insecurity. Corporate profits, a robust stock market, and GDP, in and of themselves, may not be preserved at the cost of human lives. Only when public health is relatively secure should we begin to concern ourselves with accumulating wealth.