

ORTHODOX UNION

Statement on Vaccinations from the OU and Rabbinical Council of America

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Orthodox Jewish parents, like responsible parents across the United States, overwhelmingly vaccinate their children against measles, mumps, rubella, polio and the other childhood diseases for which inoculations are now almost miraculously commonplace. As in many communities, a small minority of parents chooses not to do so. The ongoing measles outbreak demonstrates how this could bear very serious consequences, not only for their own children but others' too, especially those medically unable to be vaccinated. **The Orthodox Union (OU) and the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) strongly urge all parents to vaccinate their healthy children on the timetable recommended by their pediatrician.**

Parents who choose to not vaccinate often cite a medical study that purported to link autism and the **MMR vaccine**. The study was discovered to be fraudulent and was withdrawn; its lead author was found to have acted "dishonestly and irresponsibly," and his license to practice medicine in Britain was revoked.

Judaism places the highest value on preserving human life. It is well known that those facing even a *potential* life or death situation are instructed to set aside the Sabbath and other key tenets of *halachic* (Jewish law) observance until the emergency has passed. Prayers for good health and for the complete and perfect healing of the ill are an ages-old aspect of Jewish tradition. But prayers must go hand-in-hand with availing oneself of medical science, including vaccination.

There are *halachic* obligations to care for one's own health as well as to take measures to prevent harm and illness to others, and Jewish law defers to the consensus of medical experts in determining and prescribing appropriate medical responses to illness and

prevention. Therefore, the consensus of major *poskim* (halachic decisors) supports the vaccination of children to protect them from disease, to eradicate illness from the larger community through so-called herd immunity, and thus to protect others who may be vulnerable.

While the health of children is an important consideration, everyone should consult with his or her religious, medical and legal advisors in determining what actions to take. Nothing in this statement should be construed to add to or detract from rights or obligations created by New York or other state and federal statutes and regulations.

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