

The COVID-19 Vaccine and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

One of the many harmful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a rise in antisemitism and misinformation.¹ Jews have been falsely accused of everything from creating the disease to spreading it and withholding the cure. In December, 2020, this trend took a new turn when anti-Israel groups smeared Israel by falsely claiming it was “denying COVID-19 vaccines to Palestinians.” Here is what actually happened:

Israel lobbied pharmaceutical companies for access to their COVID-19 vaccines long before most countries, making it the fastest country to start vaccinating its citizens.

- Israel’s small size and well-organized health system made it an ideal place to gather data about the vaccine’s effectiveness, and Israel also paid 2-4 times more than the EU per dose.²
- The vaccine has been distributed to Israelis of all backgrounds, and to Palestinians in East Jerusalem who have residency or citizenship in Israel and are not under Palestinian Authority (PA) rule.³

Palestinian leaders did not ask for the vaccine or claim Israel was denying it to them until after anti-Israel groups began spreading such smears in the media and elsewhere.

- Under the Oslo Accords, an international treaty between Israelis and Palestinians, the PA is responsible for Palestinian healthcare, including administering vaccines.⁴
- On December 21, 2020 Jerusalem Post journalist Khaled Abu Toameh reported that PA officials, “do not expect Israel to sell them, or purchase on their behalf, the vaccine from any country.”⁵ As such, they did not coordinate with Israel to distribute the vaccine to Palestinians.
- The PA did not begin attacking Israel regarding vaccines until January, 2021, well after anti-Israel groups outside the region did so for propaganda purposes. On January 10th the PA backtracked and said, “providing healthcare and COVID vaccinations” was their responsibility.⁶

The PA focused on obtaining millions of doses of the Russian vaccine and additional doses from the World Health Organization’s COVAX program.⁷

- The Pfizer vaccine initially used in Israel must be stored at -70° C (-94° F) and used within five days of removal from cold storage. Because the PA could not consistently satisfy these requirements, they preferred vaccines which are more stable and last longer, such as the one from AstraZeneca.⁸

¹ StandWithUs, “Hate in the time of Corona,” 2020, at swurl.cc/?hateinthetimeofcorona

² TOI Staff, “Top health official: In deal with Pfizer, Israel to share public data only,” *Times of Israel*, January 9, 2021, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/health-official-says-pfizer-vaccine-deal-only-includes-publicly-available-data/>; Dan Williams, “Israel marshals supplies in dash for full vaccination of at-risk groups,” *Reuters*, December 31, 2020, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-israel/israel-marshals-supplies-in-dash-for-full-vaccination-of-at-risk-groups-idUSKBN2950UC>

³ Jake Wallis Simons, “What Amnesty International gets wrong about Israel’s vaccine programme,” *The Spectator*, January 10, 2021, at <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/what-amnesty-international-gets-wrong-about-israel-s-vaccine-programme>

⁴ Aaron Boxerman, “Palestinians hope for vaccines by March, knock Israel for not providing them,” *Times of Israel*, January 11, 2021, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-hope-for-vaccines-by-march-knock-israel-for-not-providing-doses/>

⁵ Khaled Abu Toameh, “Palestinians: We didn’t ask Israel for COVID-19 vaccine”, *Jerusalem Post*, December 21, 2020 at <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/palestinians-we-didnt-ask-israel-for-covid-19-vaccine-652703>;

Ruptly Staff, “East Jerusalem: High-risk groups receive first doses of COVID-19 vaccine”, *Ruptly*, Dec 25, 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M4JveN-gsY&ab_channel=Ruptly

⁶ Aaron Boxerman, “Palestinians hope for vaccines by March, knock Israel for not providing them,” *Times of Israel*, January 11, 2021, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-hope-for-vaccines-by-march-knock-israel-for-not-providing-doses/>

⁷ Aaron Boxerman, “Palestinian Authority expects 4 million doses of Russian vaccine in coming weeks”, *Times of Israel*, December 12, 2020, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-authority-expects-4-million-doses-of-russian-vaccine-in-coming-weeks/>

⁸ Aaron Boxerman, “Palestinians expect first vaccines only between January and March”, *Times of Israel*, December 10, 2020 at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-expect-first-vaccines-only-between-january-and-march/>

- The PA has also been slowed by internal dysfunction and corruption. This includes spending vast sums to reward terrorists who have been arrested for injuring or murdering Israeli civilians.⁹

There has been strong Israeli-Palestinian cooperation to fight the pandemic.

- Even the U.N., which frequently discriminates against Israel in numerous ways, has repeatedly praised Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰
- There were conflicting reports, but according to the *Israel Hayom* newspaper, Israel offered to help the PA purchase vaccines and to set aside extra vaccines for the PA if possible.^{11,12}
- Israel may have secretly provided vaccines to PA leaders, though the PA Health Ministry denied this.¹³
- The PA began vaccinating its medical professionals after Israel shared 5,000 doses in February, 2021¹⁴. Later in the month, Israel and the PA reportedly made an agreement to coordinate vaccinations for an additional 100,000 Palestinians who work in Israel^{15,16}.
- In late February, 2021, Israeli medics set up a COVID-19 vaccination drive at the Qalandiya Crossing for Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, on the other side of the security barrier¹⁷.
- Israel facilitated delivery of vaccines to Gaza, after a delay. The move was controversial, as some Israelis demanded that Hamas free two Israeli hostages and return the remains of two others, as a condition for transferring the vaccines¹⁸.

It is not clear how many Palestinians would even take the vaccine from Israel.

- Unfortunately, conspiracy theories are widespread among Palestinians in East Jerusalem, making them suspicious of the vaccine even though it is available to them.¹⁹ Similarly, in a recent public opinion poll 50% of Palestinians in the West Bank said they would refuse the vaccine.²⁰

⁹ Jake Wallis Simons, "What Amnesty International gets wrong about Israel's vaccine programme", *The Spectator*, January 10, 2021, at <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/what-amnesty-international-gets-wrong-about-israel-s-vaccine-programme>

¹⁰ United Nations, "COVID-19: UN envoy hails strong Israel-Palestine cooperation," *UN News*, March 28, 2020, at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060572>; United Nations, "Common coronavirus enemy, forges some Palestine-Israel cooperation, but West Bank annexation looms," *UN News*, April 23, 2020, at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062452>

¹¹ Rina Bassist, "As vaccinations begin, Israel may offer Palestinians surplus," *Al-Monitor*, at <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/israel-palestinian-authority-benjamin-netanyahu-coronavirus.html>

¹² Jake Wallis Simons, "What Amnesty International gets wrong about Israel's vaccine programme", *The Spectator*, January 10, 2021, at <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/what-amnesty-international-gets-wrong-about-israel-s-vaccine-programme>

¹³ Jake Wallis Simons, "What Amnesty International gets wrong about Israel's vaccine programme", *The Spectator*, January 10, 2021, at <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/what-amnesty-international-gets-wrong-about-israel-s-vaccine-programme>

¹⁴ Rina Bassist, "Israel hatches plan to vaccinate Palestinian workers", *Al-Monitor*, February 23, 2021 at <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/02/israel-palestinian-authority-west-bank-gaza-moderna-pfizer.html>

¹⁵ Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, Khaled Abu Toameh, Coronavirus: Israel to vaccinate 100,000 Palestinian workers, *Jerusalem Post*, February 20, 2021 at <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-to-vaccinate-100000-palestinian-workers-report-659568>

¹⁶ Joseph Krauss, Palestinians give first vaccines after Israel shares supply, *AP News*, February 2, 2021, at <https://apnews.com/article/israel-coronavirus-vaccine-coronavirus-pandemic-united-nations-jerusalem-48e01d2df346ad6f070555674182dfa1>

¹⁷ Idan Zonshine, COVID vaccine: Israel sets up station for Palestinians in east Jerusalem, *Jerusalem Post*, February 23, 2021 at <https://www.jpost.com/health-science/mda-to-set-up-vaccination-station-at-qalandiya-crossing-in-east-jerusalem-659877>

¹⁸ Fares Akram and Joseph Krauss, "After delay, Israel allows vaccines into Hamas-run Gaza," *AP*, February 17, 2021, at <https://apnews.com/article/israel-health-coronavirus-pandemic-west-bank-gaza-strip-74da17fc337ce6e9812f05c9e0d0461f>

¹⁹ Aaron Boxerman, "With distrust rampant, East Jerusalem Palestinians shirk COVID vaccine," *Times of Israel*, January 6, 2021, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/with-distrust-rampant-east-jerusalem-palestinians-shirk-covid-vaccine/>

²⁰ Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research, *Press Release: Public Opinion Poll No (78)*, December 15, 2020, at <https://pcpsr.org/en/node/827>

- Trust between Israelis and Palestinians is at a record low.²¹ Even if Israel were fully able, willing, and allowed to administer the vaccine, conspiracy theories, misinformation, and distrust would make it exceedingly difficult to do successfully.

²¹ Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research, *Poll Summary: Palestinian-Israeli Pulse*, August 13, 2018, at <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/731>