



IANPHI Thematic Committee on Pandemic Preparedness, Response and Recovery -
Webinar 'Pandemics and Public Health Ethics in the Age of the New Normal'

January 9, 2025

Summary

The webinar, co-hosted by Nadav Davidovitch and Tom Fowler, Deputy National Director of Health Protection and Screening services in Public Health, Wales, focused on public health ethics in the context of pandemics. It was inspired by discussions within the IANPHI Thematic Committee on Pandemic Preparedness, Response and Recovery, with participation from Dr. Farhang Tazib, Prof. Alison McCallum, and Dr. Maya Pelled Raz.

The presentations started with Dr. Farhang Tazib, Conventor, Public Health and Ethics and Law Network, emphasizing the importance of integrating ethics into public health practice, particularly during pandemics. He advocated for embedding values like solidarity and social justice in policy-making and stressed the need for continuous professional development in public health organizations. He pointed out that public health progress stems from learning from past failures, such as the Ebola outbreak, and constantly rethinking what is morally unacceptable, especially in areas like vaccine inequity and emergency response.

Prof Alison McCallum, Visting (Honorary) Professor of Public Health from the University of Edinburgh, then discussed the ethical challenges posed by global vaccine inequity. She emphasized the need for upstream solutions that tackle the root causes of inequity, such as structural power imbalances and health-related relationships between individuals, communities, and institutions. Prof. McCallum also highlighted the importance of considering the cognitive burden on marginalized communities and the need for accessible solutions that reduce harm. She advocated for co-design and integrated impact assessments to ensure health policies meet the needs of diverse populations and promote collective well-being.

During the last presentation, Dr. Maya Pelled Raz, Head of the Bioethics Division of the University of Haifa, explored the impact of the green badge system during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly its effects on solidarity and public trust. Research from Israel and Taiwan revealed that while the system influenced vaccination decisions, personal autonomy and information sources played a more significant role in individuals' choices. Dr. Raz stressed the importance of public trust in authorities and health professionals and suggested that better public health education, especially in medical schools, could help improve decision-making and advice provided to the public.

The discussion also addressed the challenges of embedding public health ethics in everyday practices. The speakers highlighted the importance of strategic training in ethics and the need to understand public health within broader social and political contexts. They underscored the need for balancing individual rights with the common good and learning from past mistakes to improve future pandemic response strategies.

The webinar provided valuable insights into how public health professionals can integrate ethics into their work to address the complex challenges of pandemics. By fostering a discussion on ethical principles like solidarity, justice, and equity, the event highlighted the need for ethical frameworks that ensure equitable and effective public health interventions during global crises.