



To:  
Members of the Education Committee

**Subject: Continued Operation of the Education System during the Corona Crisis**

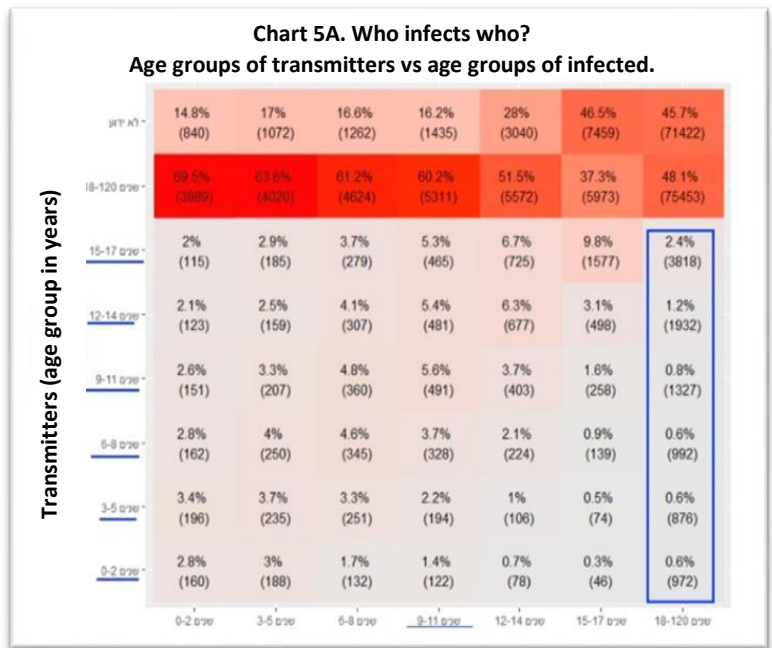
Honorable Members,

**Three factors** should be considered when examining the ramifications of opening or closing down the education system when public restrictions are implemented with the objective of reducing Covid-19 infections:

1. Children as a cause of transmission.
2. The risk posed to children infected with the virus.
3. The harm caused to children resulting from closure of the education system.

**Children as a cause of infection**

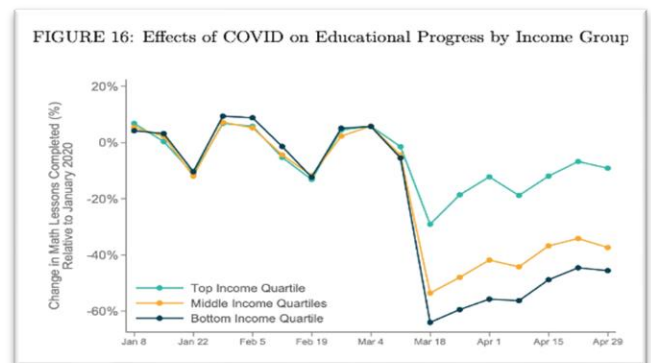
Studies from around the world **have consistently shown that children are less likely to be infected and even less likely to transmit the virus** to others (particularly adults). A meta-analysis found that a child's chance of contracting the virus is 50% lower than that of an adult. According to the American Center for Disease Control (CDC), the rate of infection in children is less than 2% of all cases. Furthermore, in other countries (such as Sweden, where the education system was open continuously, and Australia) morbidity rates in children appear to be negligible relative to their proportion of the population. A recent study by the European Center for Disease Control (ECDC) shows that **schools are not the 'platform' that drives community infection. Schools do not increase COVID-19 infection but rather represent the community's cumulative 'background infection' at that time.** Research indicates that the primary cause of viral transmissions is in homes and the community, and that children are not a significant accelerator of transmission of COVID-19, in contrast to seasonal flu and colds where children constitute a major transmission factor. A report surveying 191 countries found no association between opening schools and a rise in morbidity or correlations linking the two. In Israel, Ministry of Health data presents a similar picture. Regarding Israeli data, the table shows that the "infection propellant" is found significantly in confirmed infected subjects in the 18 years and above age group - about 80% of all infections of known transmission are caused by adults. Moreover, **about 90% of cases of infection in adults with known origin were caused by other adults, and not by children.**



**The risk for children infected with COVID19**

In all countries around the world, it has been reported that **serious morbidity and mortality are rare among children.** According to numerous studies, children show higher resistance than adults to an identical viral load. According to the CDC, the rate of symptoms in children is very low: only 11% of children diagnosed as carriers reported symptoms. PIMS syndrome (or MISC), which presents a dramatic picture of the disease in children infected with the virus and which initially caused great concern, seems to be extremely rare. According to the CDC, COVID-19 mortality rates among children are lower than those of influenza.

COVID-19 mortality at the age of 15 is 1000 times lower than at the age of 80. In Israel, 3 children under the age of 17 were officially reported to have died from COVID-19, which turned out to be over-reported in at least one of the cases in which a 6-year-old girl in the Palestinian governed areas died not from COVID-19 (as reported by the hospital).





This situation is unfolding when in Israel, an average of more than 10 children die each year from complications associated with similar illnesses like influenza.

### **Damaging effects to children caused by the closure of the education system**

A survey examining the impact of school closures around the world shows that this step has a marginal effect on mortality but causes very severe economic damage to industry.

A study conducted by Tel Aviv University's Laboratory for the Study of Infectious Diseases, that was based on cellphone movement data, revealed that **closing schools may actually increase the number of pandemic victims.** According to the ECDC, school closures have significant negative consequences for children, both for physical and mental health, beyond the harm caused to their education.

Worldwide and Israeli reports showed **an increase in the use of addictive substances, the consumption of "screen time", violence, obesity, eating disorders, mental distress, and suicide.** Similarly, various testimonies found impairment in the development of social skills and increasing social disparities. Shown in the included graph is the influence of closing the education system on students' academic performance in mathematics, an area in which **the weaker socio-economic groups are most adversely affected.** The closure of the education system has a decisive socio-economic impact, as it prevents parents from going to work and impairs family emotional stability and livelihood.

### **Summary**

The data which has been gathered worldwide and in Israel indicates that children are less infectious, less infected, and less affected even when infected. Furthermore, closing the education system leads to significant harm in terms of health, mental health, well-being, and exacerbates social disparities. Accordingly, in most European countries in which the authorities decided to impose another lockdown, it was decided to leave the schools open, without any preconditions of mass COVID testing of either children or staff.

The ECDC concludes that **closing schools should be a last resort**, one implemented only after all other measures to slow morbidity have been exhausted.

**Accordingly, the Emergency Council supports the Knesset Education Committee's decision to open the entire education system.**

Signed,

**Public Emergency Council for the Covid19 Crisis**



## The Members of the Council\* (in alphabetical order)



### Dr. Yifat Abdi-Kork

An expert in epidemiology and molecular biology, served as a Consultant to the national health basket public committee and Head of Pharmacoeconomics Department, Israeli Center for Technology Assessment in Health Care, the Gertner Institute.



### Prof. Zvika Granot

Professor of Immunology in the Faculty of Medicine at the Hebrew University. An international expert in the field of neutrophil research, is developing new approaches to immunotherapy.



### Dr. Bruria Adini

PhD in Health Systems Management, serves as head of the Department of Emergency and Disaster Management at Tel Aviv University. Former Head of the IDF Emergency Preparedness Division (Lt. Col.) and Senior Consultant to the Ministry of Health's Emergency Division.



### Dr. Michal Hemo Lotem

Pediatrician, Entrepreneur and author on leadership at medical futurism. Served as Vice President of Innovation at the Sheba Medical Center, and as a member of the Prime Minister's Advisory Council. Founded Beterem - Safe Kids Israel, and OSHEYA - Women Lead Wellness. Received Prime Minister's special Award for her contribution to children.



### Prof. Amos Adler

Professor of Medicine in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Specialist in Pediatrics and Clinical Microbiology. Director of the Microbiological Laboratory at Sourasky Medical Center Tel Aviv, Treasurer of the Israeli Association for Infectious Diseases.



### Prof. Asa Kasher

Professor Emeritus of Professional Ethics and Philosophy at Tel Aviv University. Laureate of the Israel Prize for Philosophy. Member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. Wrote dozens of state and public codes of ethics, including the military code of ethics, as well as serving as a member of several national public committees



### Prof. Elian Alkrinawi

Professor of Social Work, served as president of the Achva College, head of the Department of Social Work at Ben-Gurion University and as dean of the School of Social Work at Memorial University in Canada. Killam Award winner and beacon lighter at the 2013 Independence Day ceremony.



### Prof. Amnon Lahad

Specialist in Family Medicine (ISR) and Public health (US). Head departments of Family Medicine Hebrew University & Clalit Health Services, Jerusalem, Israel. Vice Dean Academia – Family medicine, Hebrew University. Chairman of the National Council for the Health of the Community. Active Family physician in Jerusalem.



### Prof. Zvi Bentwich

Professor of Medicine, specialist in Clinical Immunology and Infectious Diseases. Served as Chief of Department of Medicine, and pioneered AIDS medicine in Israel. Currently Head of Center for Tropical Diseases and AIDS at Ben-Gurion University. President of NALA Foundation for the Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases in Developing Countries and Board Member of Physicians for Human Rights in Israel.



### Prof. Retsef Levi

Professor of Operations Management at the MIT Sloan School of Management. An international expert in safety, risk management and analytics-driven design and optimization of health systems and biologic drugs manufacturing systems. He is leading several large-scale research collaborations across the world with leading industry enterprises and government organizations. He has consulted multiple state governments during the COVID-19 pandemic.



### Dr. Orna Blondheim

Specialist in Pediatrics and Neonatology as well as Director of Health Systems. She served as the director of the Schneider Children's Hospital and served 16 years as CEO of Emek Medical Center



### Prof. Udi Qimron

Chair of the Department of Clinical Microbiology and Immunology at Tel Aviv University. Expert in T cells, mucosal vaccines, genetic engineering of bacterial viruses, and CRISPR. Published in Science, Nature and Cell and has won prestigious research grants including the ERC. Partner in the establishment of the SARS-CoV-2 testing laboratories.



### Prof. Emerita Rivka Carmi

Professor of Medicine, Specialist in Pediatrics, Neonatology and Medical Genetics. Served as Director of the Genetic Institute at Soroka Hospital, Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Ben-Gurion University, Chairman of the Dean of Medical Schools Association, President of Ben-Gurion University and Chairman of the Board of Universities.



### Dr. Amir Shachar

Specialist in internal medicine, cardiology, emergency medicine and health administration. Established and managed the Department of Emergency Medicine at Sheba Hospital, was deputy director of Meir Hospital and currently heading the ER at Laniado Hospital. Founded the Emergency Medicine department at Tel Aviv University.



### Prof. Aaron Ciechanover

Serves as a Distinguished Professor at the Faculty of Medicine in the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. Awarded with the chemistry Nobel Prize, as well as the Lasker Award, the Israel Prize, and the EMET Prize. He is a member of the US National Academies of Sciences (NAS) and Medicine (NAM), the Israeli National Academy of Sciences and Humanities, and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican.



### Prof. Mordechai Shani

Professor of Medicine and Medical Management, Specialist in Internal Medicine. Winner of the Israel Prize. Served twice as Director General of the Ministry of Health and Director of Sheba Hospital, as well as Chairman of the Medicines Committee. Founded and managed the School of Public Health at Tel Aviv University, and also established and managed the National Institute for Health Policy Research.



### Prof. Eran Dolev

Professor of Medicine, Military Medicine and Medical History, Specialist in Internal Medicine, Director of Health Systems and Ethics in Medicine. He served as Surgeon General of the IDF, as Director of the Internal Medicine Department, and as Chairman of the Ethics Bureau of the Medical Association and Head of the International Review Board of Tel Aviv University.



### Prof Emerita Zahava Solomon

Lt. Col (ret). Recipient of the Israel Prize, the Emet Prize and The Laufer Award. Her research in Social Work and Psychiatric Epidemiology focuses on man - made trauma. Served as head of research in mental health IDF. Head of the School of Social Work and director of the Trauma I-Core, TAU and DSM-4 (APA) committee.



### Prof. Asher Elhayany

Professor of Medicine, Specialist in Family Medicine and Public Administration. He served as the CEO of Meir Hospital, the director of the Central District at Clalit Medical Centre, and as the director of the United Health Fund. He served as chairman of the National Council for Health in the Community. Family doctor in the Negev.



### Dr. Yoav Yehezkeili

Specialist in Internal Medicine and Medical Management. Lecturer in the Department of Emergency and Disaster Management at Tel Aviv University. Lt. Col. Res., One of the founders of the epidemic treatment team and evaluation programs for extreme biological incidents. Served as a hospital's deputy director, district physician, director of the primary care division in the HMOs. Medical consultant to KI research institute.



### Prof. Eitan Friedman

Professor of Medicine in the Department of Genetics and Biochemistry, Specialist in Internal Medicine and Medical Genetics, PhD from the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. Established the Ontogenetic Unit and Clinic for High-Risk Women at Sheba Hospital, serves as chair of the Ministry of Health's Supreme Helsinki Committee.

\*The opinions expressed are the individual opinions of the members, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the institutions to which the members are affiliated.