

A CUFI PRIMER: Israel and the COVID-19 Fight

Israel: A Light Unto the Nations

Since its rebirth in 1948, Israel has been engaged in a battle for survival against multiple enemies which seek to wipe the Jewish state from the map. But 2020 saw a new threat emerge as the covid-19 pandemic led to a global shutdown. Nations across the world responded, seeking ways to contain the virus's rapid spread. Israel, a global leader in medical and technological innovation, mobilized its resources to not only fight the covid-19 outbreak domestically but also to bring relief to nations all over the world, while focusing significant energy and resources on finding a much-needed vaccine.

Research and Development

From the beginning of the pandemic Israel has mobilized its resources to bringing relief to a world suffering from this new threat.

The Israeli Defense Ministry's research-and-development wing, which has been at the cutting edge of ensuring that Israel maintains a qualitative edge over its numerically superior enemies in the region, has pivoted its mission to join the fight against covid-19. Major hospitals and research institutes joined with Israel's respected high-tech sector and its military sector to respond to the crisis.¹



As Brig. Gen. Dani Gold who is spearheading the efforts stated, "In Israel, if there is a mission that has to be done, it's like a war, everybody drops what they're doing, tunes into the mission and works on the mission with a lot of energy and creativity." And Israel has shared and supported other nations in the fight.



As the demand for ventilators skyrocketed across the globe, Microsoft's research and development center in Israel worked with Israel's emergency service Magen David Adom, the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center (Ichilov Hospital), and the Israeli Air Force to develop a low-cost ventilator that can be mass-produced in a laboratory without the need of dedicated factories—"an innovation that could potentially save thousands of lives."²

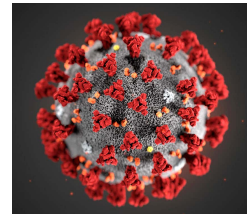
Israeli researchers sought new ways to diagnose the virus, while keeping medical professionals safe. Israeli institutions have worked on innovative ways to develop methods to test for covid-19 using a patient's voice.³ The Israeli health maintenance organization Leumit Health Care Services joined together with the Israeli Army's Technology and Logistics Branch to build a method for carrying out coronavirus tests that would eliminate the need for protective equipment for the paramedic or nurse administering the test.⁴

In a major breakthrough, researchers at Ben Gurion University in Beersheba announced that they had developed a new method of coronavirus testing. So far it has produced a 90% success rate in testing the virus and astonishingly the results are produced in under a minute.



The Search for a Vaccine

As the contagiousness of covid-19 and the disruption it would cause to everyday life became clear, the need for a vaccine became even more urgent. As Israel mobilized its medical research institutions, multiple projects were underway to find the vaccine. The Technion Institute of Technology alone has several emergency projects taking place to enhance testing and develop medicines to win the fight against the virus.⁵



The Galilee Research Institute announced in late April that they were close to completing the production of the active component of a coronavirus vaccine that could be tested on humans as early as June 1.



In mid-March, the Israeli Institute for Biological Research Institute (IIBR) announced that it had begun working on development of a vaccine.⁶ In early May, less than two months later, Israel's Minister of Defense announced a "significant breakthrough" had been presented to him in the fight against covid-19.⁷

According to IIBR researchers, identifying the antibody that neutralizes the coronavirus, which will require rigorous testing, has been completed. The laboratory pledged that it would continue its

work by engaging in human trials and then hopes to contact international companies with the aim of producing the antibody in commercial quantities.

As Israel takes a leading role in efforts to combat covid-19, Israeli President Rivlin's words ring true: "In my talks with world leaders, whenever we speak about breakthroughs and innovation — all eyes are on us. This is a long and complex process, but any breakthrough you make is a significant step towards victory."

Global Relief

As nations across the globe struggle with the impact of the virus, Israel, though a tiny country, has played an outsized role in bringing relief to many countries, even those who have not always been on the friendliest of terms with the Jewish state.

Three Arab Gulf states—Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and a third unnamed state which many believe is Kuwait—have been actively engaged in cooperation with Israel's health system, with one of the states requesting help in installing an advanced telemedicine system to confront the coronavirus pandemic.⁸

The United Nations, which has long been a place that has focused on unfairly condemning Israel, has even offered some rare praise of the Jewish State. Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, "praised the coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities in their responses to the pandemic, which he believes is a major factor in the level of disease containment achieved so far."⁹

In a true display of the deep friendship that exists between the United States and Israel, Israeli airline El-AL flew a humanitarian flight from China to Detroit, Michigan. The precious cargo aboard the Israeli jet comprised of 3.5 million surgical and KN95 protective masks, face shields and pulse oximeters to be distributed to Michigan hospitals, senior living facilities, first responders and other professionals in desperate need of equipment to keep safe and avoid contracting covid-19.¹⁰



Though the world faces this new challenge and the future remains uncertain, Israel is working tirelessly to find a vaccine for covid-19. Even in a time of crisis, Israel has shown its commitment to preserving human life.

- ¹ David M. Halbfinger Israeli Army's Idea Lab Aims at New Target: Saving Lives, (May 7, 2020), New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/world/middleeast/coronavirus-israel.html>
- ² Adi Pick, The Israeli Development That Could Produce Hundreds of Ventilators a Day, (March 29 2020), Algemeiner, <https://www.cufi.org/the-israeli-development-that-could-produce-hundreds-of-ventilators-a-day/>
- ³ TOI Staff, Israeli startup aims to identify coronavirus carriers using their voice, (March 25 2020), Times of Israel, <https://www.cufi.org/israeli-startup-aims-to-identify-coronavirus-carriers-using-their-voice/>
- ⁴ CTech Staff, Israeli Army Partners With HMO to Develop Innovative Coronavirus Testing Unit (May 5 2020), <https://www.algemeiner.com/2020/05/05/israeli-army-partners-with-hmo-to-develop-innovative-coronavirus-testing-unit/>
- ⁵ Aaron Reich, Technion researchers working on emergency projects to fight coronavirus, (March 25 2020), Jerusalem Post, <https://www.jpost.com/HEALTH-SCIENCE/Technion-researchers-working-on-emergency-projects-to-fight-coronavirus-622300>
- ⁶ Ido Efrati *and* Chaim Levinson, Israeli Research Center to Announce It Developed Coronavirus Vaccine, Sources Say (March 18 2020), Haaretz <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-coronavirus-vaccine-israel-biological-research-institute-developed-1.8665074>
- ⁷ i24 Staff, Israel's Defense Ministry hails 'significant breakthrough' in new COVID-19 treatment, (May 5 2020), I24 News, <https://www.cufi.org/israels-defense-ministry-hails-significant-breakthrough-in-new-covid-19-treatment/>
- ⁸ Raphael Ahren, Three Gulf States Reach Out to Israel for Help Battling COVID-19 Pandemic, (May 10 2020), Times of Israel, <https://www.cufi.org/three-gulf-states-reach-out-to-israel-for-help-battling-covid-19-pandemic/>
- ⁹ COVID-19: UN envoy hails strong Israel-Palestine cooperation (March 28 2020), UN News, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060572>
- ¹⁰ Jennifer Lovy, Israeli Airline Brings Precious COVID Cargo to Detroit, The Jewish News, (April 16 2020), <https://thejewishnews.com/2020/04/16/israeli-airline-brings-precious-covid-cargo-to-detroit/>