

Lockdown Lunacy

By [Hadas Magen](#) and [Globes](#)

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Former Health Ministry chief Prof. Yoram Lass says governments can't halt viruses and the lockdown will kill more people from depression than the virus.

Former Ministry of Health director-general Prof. Yoram Lass has been regularly interviewed by the Israeli media since the coronavirus outbreak first started. But in contrast to the prophets of doom and deep concern shown by most medical professionals, he has presented a somewhat different and controversial opinion. Prof. Lass feels that it is wrong to shut down the entire country because of a virus that is ultimately less of a killer than the flu. In other words, he is saying that taking into account the cost benefits, it is preferable 'to sacrifice' the elderly so that daily life can go on as normal. This is an outlook that has antagonized many and has made him a 'persona non grata' in the TV interview studios.

Lass is at peace with himself over all this and with the voices calling him 'deluded.' "I didn't invite myself to the studios," he told "Globes," "and I'm prepared to give my opinion to everybody who is ready to listen."

Do you think you are being excluded because you presented an unpopular position?

"I can tell you that several days ago I heard with my own ears, after I was interviewed on the radio by Nissim Mishal, the deputy director of the Ministry of Health Prof. Itamar Grotto tell Mishal that I shouldn't be brought into studios. And last Friday, I was invited to the studio by Ayala Hasson. Some three days beforehand, they called me and ask not to go anywhere else, and then the day before they cancelled. And who did they replace me with on the program? The futurist David Passig, who told the people of Israel that in the best case scenario 40 million people would die, and in the worst case scenario 300 million people would die. That shows you how the media is only trumpeting hysteria. Because it was clear that if I was sitting next to him, I would only have told an amazed Israeli people that every year 17,000 Italians die of flu while in Israel only 126 dies of flue last year.

What does that mean?

"Italy is known for its enormous morbidity in respiratory problems, more than three times any other European country. In the US about 40,000 people die in a regular flu season and so far 40-50 people have died of the coronavirus, most of them in a nursing home in Kirkland, Washington."

"The characteristics in every country are different. In Italy the median age of those dying of the coronavirus is 81 and the population is very old and frail and smokes more and among the dead are more men. In Korea, in contrast, more young women and non-smokers have

been infected. In every country, more people die from regular flu compared with those who die from the coronavirus. All this is what I was saying when they were still listening to me. Instead of this they bring somebody like Passig, who says the opposite things, and I'm sure that what he says won't happen."

How can you be sure?

"Because there is a very good example that we all forget: the swine flu in 2009. That was a virus that reached the world from Mexico. But what? At that time there was no Facebook or there maybe was but it was still in its infancy. The coronavirus in contrast is a virus with public relations."

Whoever thinks that governments end viruses is wrong

The number of deaths from the virus is not what is shocking in the eyes of Lass. "I won't say how many people will ultimately die from coronavirus, but what I say to myself is that in a large country like China, in the entire Wuhan region, which has 70 million people, 3,000 people have died. In that entire country, the numbers are very low. If that was like the black plague in the Middle Ages in Europe, in which one third of Italians died, then 20 million people would die. Small pox, which the European brought to America, killed off all the Indians. The atmosphere today in Israel is as if there is some type of disease, which will kill off all the population. If Passig says that 300 million will die (worldwide) then 1 million will die in Israel.

But it is not only in Israel. All the countries that were apparently complacent until now, like Germany and the UK, have all now brought in a policy of lockdown.

"Even so I say that the numbers do not match the panic. That's because in China they stopped the virus and because of natural immunity, which they've forgotten to talk about. What stopped the swine flu pandemic and what generally stops viruses? Whoever thinks that the government ends viruses is completely wrong. What really happens? The virus, which nobody can stop, spreads throughout the population and then the population, not those at risk, are exposed to the virus and simultaneously the body creates antibodies to shut down and prevent the disease. At the moment in Israel, the virus is being spread around by a great many people who don't know that they have it and people are being exposed and becoming immune. The chain of infection is broken and in that way the virus comes to a halt."

You're talking about the British model in which the elderly are forced into isolation and the rest of the population develops natural immunity and continues their lives as normal?

"Yes, I agree completely with that approach. On the one hand, to protect the weak population, while leaving the rest of the other people to carry on."

But then we see that even the British prime minister Boris Johnson, who led that policy, was forced to back down.

"He caved in. We are in a clear situation of psychology prevailing over science. The science rests on data. I presented to you some numbers and statistics that demonstrate that the genie is not terrible. Regular flu makes people yawn and the old person in a bed in a hospital corridor doesn't interest anybody but we have become monstrously hysterical and

in the past fascist regimes have come to power. It's the same type of craziness. Entire peoples are undergoing some sort of mental process."

A lot of antagonism has been stirred up towards you by your comments that the elderly population can be sacrificed.

"I didn't use such a terrible word as 'to sacrifice' at all. The journalist asked me if that's what I meant and on TV you don't have the possibility of explaining in detail, so I simply answered yes. But that's not what I meant although I take responsibility for it."

So what did you mean?

"To say that in life we take risks, and I've got some examples: when we drive in the car we cause the deaths of about 350 people per year (in Israel). If we stopped all transportation in Israel, we would save their lives. We would save them."

"Another example: many soldiers who are young and have their entire lives before them are killed so that the defense plans and policies can be implemented, and which are sometimes deluded. So because of the risk we should dismantle the IDF in order to save the soldiers' lives?"

If we get back to our example, the medical price of what is happening now resembles price paid for the seasonal flu virus that we have every fall. In the State of Israel, 126 people die, in the US 40,000 people, in Italy 17,000 and that's the price we are prepared to pay to live normal lives."

The economic damage is harder than the health damage

"I call it the economic and social Yom Kippur. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis have lost their livelihood and their support and many more will die from heart attacks and anxiety or depression as a result of this. So in life we take risks and pay the price."

You need courage to present an opposing opinion

Why in your opinion is your position received with such antagonism?

"I receive a lot of support from people in the public, although of course not from a representative sample. There is to my regret somebody who is being saved by all this hysteria at the moment, so he is not going to extinguish it but he is 'going along with' the whole thing and I admit that you need courage to present an opposing position."

Well, it's clear who you mean

"I'm talking generally. The situation is even playing into the hands of the Hungarian prime minister because the fact that two Iranian students started the virus (in his country) supports his claims against foreigners."

But still how do you explain that even leaders that initially didn't take the virus seriously, like Trump, completely changed their opinion?

"I'm a man of science, feelings won't sway me. I'm not prepared to think in contradiction to the facts but most people are prepared for psychology, if not history, to be stronger than

straightforward facts.”

What will happen if you are proven wrong? Look you yourself said that you don't know how many will ultimately die from the coronavirus.

“Every year in Italy, 17,000 die and you yawn. I will continue to say what I'm saying when 17,000 and even more die from the coronavirus. If 170,000 die then I'll say I was wrong. But meanwhile 2,200 have died in Italy and a handful in Germany out of 80 million and the virus has been spreading around the world for two months. In Germany they were doing anything special until the hysteria forced them to.”

So there is not a single brave leader who will stand up and say: I am behaving differently?

There isn't and there are even those who are exploiting it for their needs and that is the big concern, like the Hungarian prime minister and his remarks against Iranians. We know what is at the heart of the hysteria here and we know where it leads. It's like before the Yom Kippur War, there is a concept and there is no room for any other opinion. Life for everybody is destroyed but because of the anxiety everybody is falling into line with one opinion. It is an 'Orwellian' process: one people, one flag, one anxiety. Today all the hysterical people are waving the Italian flag. They are not prepared to listen to the numbers.”

But in China the virus was stopped because of the actions that the government took?

Swine flu was stopped without the world being brought to a halt. Every virus creates antibodies. A government cannot stop a virus. What stops a virus is natural immunity. It's impossible to stop a virus by government decree. And here is a question: the Chinese claim that they have stopped the virus by the lockdown but the lockdown is finished and the virus is moving around freely, so how are morbidity and mortality not continuing? If the theory of lockdown was correct they would be continuing to die there. Who discusses this?”

“The government says, 'I've done my bit' But it forgets that our bodies are extremely smart and creates natural immunity and so the chain of infection is broken and in this way the virus is ended, otherwise it would continue.

The policy of lockdown is trying to prevent a collapse of the health system under the burden of treating the sick as well as fatalities, have you not taken that into account?

“It's called flattening the curve. If you look at the number of fatalities from flu in Italy, 17,000, it is clear that that is just the tip of the iceberg beneath which there are hundreds of thousands perhaps a million, who were sick but did not die. Even the patients that did not die needed treatment and the system did not collapse. So why should there be a collapse now? For 35 years I've been hearing that the health system in Israel is collapsing. Even during the regular flu season there is overloading in hospitals. Did anybody close down the country?”

Channel 13 declined to comment on the aforementioned claims. The Ministry of Health said, “Prof. Lass, who under his watch there was the difficult recurrence of polio (1988-1989) could cause damage with his irresponsible remarks which might harm public health in Israel.”

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