

# Israel launches COVID-19 antibody tests for children as young as 3

Author:

Mon, 2021-08-23 01:10

TEL AVIV: Israel has launched antibody testing for children aged as young as three, seeking information on the number of unvaccinated youths who have developed protection against coronavirus ahead of the new school year. Despite surging daily infections caused by the highly transmissible Delta variant, Israel's government insists it wants to avoid the hardships and developmental setbacks caused by school closures.

Israel has already begun vaccinating children aged 12 and above.

The national serological survey is focused on pupils between the ages of three and 12 who are not yet eligible for the jab, nearly 1.5 million children.

It is aimed at discovering how many children developed strong antibody protection against coronavirus after having an unrecorded or latent case, according to the education ministry.

Those children with sufficient antibodies will not be forced to quarantine when exposed to a COVID-19 patient, a move aimed at limiting schoolyear disruptions.

In a statement on Sunday from the Jerusalem municipality announcing Israel's "largest serological operation," Mayor Moshe Leon urged parents to bring their children for the free 15-minute test done by finger pin-prick.

The survey is being conducted jointly by the health and education ministries and by the army's Home Front command, which told AFP on Sunday that its antibody testing operation had begun.

## **BACKGROUND**

**Israel was one of the first countries to launch a vaccination drive via an agreement with Pfizer to obtain millions of paid vaccine doses in exchange for sharing data on their effectiveness.**

A pilot program conducted last week focused in mainly ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities found that roughly a fifth of children had developed antibodies, army radio reported on Sunday.

Education Ministry director general Yigal Slovik said in a statement last month that last year's school closures caused "emotional and social damage" to students.

"The lockdowns and remote learning caused a 44 percent increase in referrals for suicidal risk diagnosis," among other impacts, he said.

Israel was one of the first countries to launch a vaccination drive in mid-December via an agreement with Pfizer to obtain millions of paid vaccine doses in exchange for sharing data on their effectiveness.

The inoculation campaign was hailed as a success story that helped

drastically reduce infections, but Israel is again registering thousands of daily cases.

As it launches the serological survey, Israel is also pushing forward with vaccinations, offering a third, or booster, shot to everyone over 40 while urging the unvaccinated to get the jab.

More than 5.4 million of Israel's roughly 9.3 million people have received two doses of the vaccine, while 1.2 million have had a third jab.

Israel has recorded nearly 980,000 coronavirus infections since the pandemic started early last year, and over 6,700 deaths.



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[Iran president urges Japan to release](#)

# billions in blocked funds amid US sanctions

Author:

Mon, 2021-08-23 00:58

DUBAI: Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi called on Japan to release Iranian funds frozen in the country because of US sanctions, Iranian state TV reported after the president met on Sunday with the visiting Japanese foreign minister.

Iran has been unable to obtain tens of billions of dollars of its assets mainly from exports of oil and gas in foreign banks, including \$3 billion of its funds in Japan, due to US sanctions on its banking and energy sectors. The sanctions were reimposed in 2018 after Washington abandoned Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with six world powers.

"The improvement of ties with Japan is of great importance for Iran ... Any delay in unblocking Iranian assets in Japanese banks is not justified," Raisi said in his meeting with Toshimitsu Motegi, who arrived in Tehran late on Sunday for a two-day visit.

Iran and six powers have been in talks since April to reinstate the nuclear pact, under which Tehran agreed to curb its nuclear program to make it harder to obtain fissile material for a weapon, in return for relief from sanctions. Tehran denies seeking nuclear weapons.

However, Iranian and Western officials have said significant gaps remain to reinstating the pact.

A sixth round of indirect talks between Tehran and Washington in Vienna adjourned on June 20, two days after hard-line cleric Raisi won the presidential election in Iran.

Iran and six powers have yet to announce when they will resume the negotiations.

Raisi, who has presented his Cabinet to parliament for a vote of confidence, is expected to adopt a "hard line" approach in the Vienna talks, according to people familiar with the matter.

Raisi, like Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has backed the nuclear talks in Vienna.

"Iran has no problem with the principle of negotiation ... What is the justification for keeping the US sanctions against Iran in place?" Iran's state media quoted Raisi as telling Japan's Motegi as saying.

In 2019, Iran's Khamenei refused to reply to a message Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe had brought to Tehran from then-US President Donald Trump, as a peacemaking visit was overshadowed by attacks on tankers in the Gulf of Oman. One of the tankers was Japanese.





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Three members of pro-Iran group killed by Daesh in Iraq

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## [Warring Yemeni factions urged to 'silence the guns' and fulfill Hodeidah Agreement](#)

Mon, 2021-08-23 00:44

ALEXANDRIA: Yemen's warring factions have been urged by a top UN official to "silence the guns" and adhere to their previous obligations to fully implement the Hodeidah Agreement.

The head of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement and chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee, Abhijit Guha, said the agreement had greatly reduced violence and civilian casualties in Hodeidah during the last three years, despite daily reports about sporadic fighting and shelling between government forces and the Houthis.

"The most important message I have is to urge the parties to the conflict to

redouble their efforts to implement their commitments under the Hodeidah Agreement in good faith,” he told Arab News.

The UN Security Council approved establishing the UNMHA and RCC in Jan. 2019. It came a month after the warring parties had signed the Stockholm Agreement. This deal has three components – the Prisoner Exchange Agreement, the Taiz Agreement and the Hodeidah Agreement.



UNMHA Head of Mission Lt. Gen. Abhijit Guha during a meeting of the Redeployment Coordination Committee in December 2019. (UNMHA)

UNMHA was assigned to monitor a Hodeidah-wide truce, the redeployment of forces from flashpoints in the city of Hodeidah and seaports, the demining process, and report to the UN Security Council about progress on the ground.

## **BACKGROUND**

**UNMHA was assigned to monitor a Hodeidah-wide truce, the redeployment of forces from flashpoints in the city of Hodeidah and seaports, the demining process, and report to the UN Security Council about progress on the ground.**

It is pressing the Yemeni parties to implement the Hodeidah Agreement. Ceasefire violations had dropped and Hodeidah seaports had seen a boom in ship movement over the last three years, Guha said.

“Ceasefire violations are down overall and economic activities, including in the ports, have increased overall since the signing of the agreement.”

The mission’s figures show that the average monthly civilian deaths in 2018 numbered 77 and the average monthly injuries numbered 93.

This year, those monthly averages were seven and 16.

The number of violent incidents peaked at 3,469 in March 2019, while there were just 92 violent incidents in the last month on record in July 2021.

Under the Stockholm Agreement, the Yemeni government, whose forces reached the edges of Hodeidah in late 2018, stopped its offensive as the Houthis agreed to pull out of the city's main seaports and deposit state revenues into the central bank's branch in the city.

The government accused the Houthis of violating the agreement by handing over security at the city's seaports to allied forces and looting billions of riyals from the central bank's branch.



UNMHA Head of Mission Lt. Gen. Abhijit Guha during a meeting of the Redeployment Coordination Committee in December 2019. (UNMHA)

Guha, who avoided naming violators, agreed that the redeployment of forces was not fully implemented.

“Under this agreement, it was envisaged that redeployment would occur in multiple phases. Unfortunately, these phases have faced obstacles, which has hampered progress on implementation. As for who is in charge of the three Hodeidah ports, this is not a question for the mission as it does not control these ports. The redeployment of forces as stipulated by the agreement remains outstanding, which is the most important obstacle to delivering on the pledges made in Stockholm.”

Another obstacle to the implementation of the agreement occurred last year, when the government boycotted the redeployment committee after a Houthi sniper gunned down a government liaison officer.

The UN official described the shooting as “an unfortunate incident” that

disrupted the agreement from being executed.

“Since the suspension, the mission has been actively seeking to bring the parties back together to revive the joint mechanisms and support them to fulfill the terms as outlined in the Hodeidah Agreement.”

The government has repeatedly demanded that UNMHA move its main office from the Houthi-controlled parts of Hodeidah city to a neutral area, noting that the Houthis had “taken the mission hostage” thereby restricting its movements.

Guha said that the mission’s current location was not permanent.

“Since its deployment, the mission’s locations have been temporary. We have held discussions with both sides to find an operationally suitable location that gives access to both, as has been stressed by the (UN) Security Council in its last resolution.”

When the Houthis resumed their offensive on the central city of Marib, the government came under huge public pressure to reactivate its halted operation on Hodeidah city to relieve pressure on its forces in Marib.

Guha advised the warring parties to avoid escalation and to consider alleviating people’s suffering, arguing that the Hodeidah Agreement had averted a major humanitarian disaster that could have struck the whole of Yemen had the government pressed ahead with the offensive on the city as most of the country’s humanitarian assistance and goods came through Hodeidah.

“Minimizing the trauma of the civilian population should remain the guiding principle of all parties. As detailed earlier, the Hodeidah Agreement has had a significant real-world impact, decreasing civilian impact, reducing violence in the governorate, and ensuring continued operationalization of Hodeidah’s ports to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid.”

Guha demanded the government and the Houthis comply with peace efforts, stop fighting and pave the way for a political settlement to end the war.

“It is vital that both parties resume dialogue, silence the guns and look to a political solution that can create conditions for a prosperous and peaceful future for all people of Yemen. Civilian casualties must stop and the welfare of the Yemeni people be put first. Now is the time for peace.”





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## [3 radio stations and TV channel suspend broadcasting amid Lebanon fuel crisis](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-08-22 03:18

BEIRUT: Three radio stations and a TV channel in Lebanon have been forced to temporarily suspend broadcasting due to the country's fuel crisis, with a government minister saying she had requested support for media outlets but to no avail.

Information Minister Manal Abdel Samad said: "Even Radio Liban, which speaks on behalf of the state, stops broadcasting whenever the electricity is cut off from the transmission centers spread across all Lebanese territories, and the government-owned Télé Liban (TL) will gradually stop broadcasting. The TL administration said that broadcast is being suspended between midnight and



seven in the morning in order to save on fuel.”

She added that she had “sent letters to the minister of energy and the army commander, requesting support for official and private media institutions, but neither responded.”

Radio Sawt El-Shaab, which is not affiliated with any political party, announced on Friday evening that it would temporarily suspend its programs due to the fuel crisis and because its guests could not reach its headquarters in Beirut.

Radio Al-Sharq and Future TV, both of which are affiliated with the Future Movement political party, also suspended broadcasting.

Radio Al-Sharq’s director, Kamal Richa, told Arab News: “The radio station, which was established in 1994, has never stopped broadcasting. But we had to turn off our generators due to the shortage of diesel, and the broadcasting stopped a few days ago.”

Both outlets are owned by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri. They faced a severe financial crisis years ago that led to a large number of employees being laid off and TV content being limited to shows from the archive, while 22 employees remain at the radio station.

Richa added: “The radio administration secured on Saturday a quantity of diesel and informed us that we can resume broadcasting on Sunday, starting at seven in the morning. However, we might have to stop broadcasting again, as nothing is guaranteed in Lebanon.”

On Tuesday, Lebanese Army Command announced that “a three-day crackdown” carried out by units in various regions had resulted in the seizure of 4,392,725 liters of gasoline and 221,140 liters of diesel that had been stored for smuggling or for sale, either on the black market or at high prices after fuel subsidies were lifted.

“The owners of these quantities were obliged to either sell them at the subsidized price or they would be seized and given to hospitals, bakeries, and private generators that have stopped working or are about to stop,” it said.

The Audio-Visual Media Workers Syndicate appealed to Abdel Samad “to seek with those concerned to find a special mechanism that allows workers to obtain gasoline, to facilitate the task of media professionals.”

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**Lebanese Army Command announced that ‘a three-day crackdown’ carried out by units in various regions had resulted in the seizure of 4,392,725 liters of gasoline and 221,140 liters of diesel that had been stored for smuggling or for sale.**

The minister said: “I seek to give priority to the media after the health sector, as we did in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign. But the crisis is too severe this time.”

Information International, a research firm in Beirut, said the lack of fuel and resorting to the black market or queuing for hours at stations had led to “a significant increase” in the cost of transport.

“It now costs 25 to 50 percent of the value of the worker’s monthly salary, depending on the distance between their residence and their workplace.”

A week ago, the percentage of employees and even military personnel who were able to make it to work decreased because of the fuel shortage. Darkness prevails in residential neighborhoods because of severe electricity rationing.

A source in the Ministry of Finance told Arab News: “Attempts are being made to maintain some subsidies, despite the parliament’s refusal to allow the Central Bank to use the mandatory reserve to subsidize fuel.

“There is a tendency to determine the pricing of fuel based on the rate of LBP8,000 to the dollar, instead of LBP3,900. This means (a 20-liter canister of) gasoline would cost approximately LBP150,000, provided that the Lebanese state bears the price difference between this price and the one based on the Central Bank’s Sayrafa platform rate of LBP16,000 to the dollar, i.e. an additional LBP8,000.

“This requires exceptional approval and a decree signed by the Ministry of Finance, the prime minister and the president. The cost of subsidies shall be covered by an advance to the Ministry of Finance, allocated in the 2022 budget. If this solution is achieved – despite the difficulties – quantities of fuel could be introduced by mid-next week, although it incurs more debts to the state.”



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## [Former head of Tunisia's Anti-Corruption Committee 'under house arrest'](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-08-22 03:07

TUNIS: The former head of Tunisia's Anti-Corruption Committee has been placed under house arrest, he said on Facebook, hours after security forces took control of the commission's headquarters.

Chaouki Tabib was the head of the independent authority from 2016 until he was dismissed by former Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh in 2020.

"A security patrol stationed in front of my house informed me that a decision was issued to place me under house arrest ... in violation of my right guaranteed by law and the constitution," Tabib said on Facebook.

Tunisian President Kais Saied last month dismissed the prime minister, froze parliament and assumed executive authority in a sudden intervention that his Islamist opponents have labeled a coup.

The move won widespread popular support, but also raised concerns among some Tunisians about the future of the democratic system that the country adopted after its 2011 revolution that triggered the Arab Spring.

Earlier on Friday, security forces cordoned off the headquarters of the Anti-Corruption Committee and evacuated its employees, in what appears to be an attempt by the authority to protect any corruption files.

Saied, who was elected in a landslide in 2019 vowing to stand up against graft, has said gangs involved in corruption in all sectors must be held accountable.

Last week, officials in the phosphate industry were arrested over suspected corruption.





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Tunisia's President Saied appoints Sami El-Hichri as new director general of national security Tunisia to impose compulsory quarantine on visitors who have not been fully vaccinated