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Question

In certain areas of the Midlands, we are experiencing issues with Muslim communities refusing to have their children vaccinated with the influenza (flu) nasal spray due to it containing porcine as a stabiliser. This vaccine is used for children to protect them and the vulnerable and elderly at serious risk of catching flu. It saves lot of pain and sicknesses in the community affecting thousands of people.

The children's flu vaccination programme is extremely important since it not only protects the child itself but also protects vulnerable family members and the wider community. This has huge benefits on the local health system, with 94% lower flu like illnesses in primary age children and 74% less visits to A &E.

A concerned Muslim Nurse asked

'So, in the bigger interest of the society's health can this vaccine be given to children? What do the scholars say about the permissibility of a flu vaccine that contains pork gelatine, is this allowed?'

Fatwa on Flu vaccine containing Porcine gelatine

I begin with the name of Allah, the Kind the Caring

The flu vaccine that contains porcine gelatine is a simple nasal spray that is particularly useful and easy to administer to children. The flu nasal spray is offered to primary school age children, some secondary school age children and 2- and 3-year olds. It is also offered to children who are susceptible to flu and have other problems like severe asthma which is exacerbated by the flu. It has been shown to reduce A &E admissions and other complications considerably. The flu nasal spray is the most effective way of protecting your child from flu but there is also the offer of the non-porcine, injectable vaccination, as an alternative to the nasal spray for children. It is important that you accept one of the vaccines to protect your child and your family.

Firstly, it's important to understand the nature of the porcine gelatine. This is a pure product and is exactly same as the cow gelatine, goat or any other animals' gelatine. It has same protein structure, same properties and same colour, texture and taste. You would not be able to distinguish the porcine gelatine from the others. Considering this fact, it is argued that it doesn't matter what its origin is. A similar fatwa was issued by Mufti Ali Jumma the Grand Mufti of Egypt about Pig products including insulin.

Secondly, this is for a medical purpose, it's not consumption or eating. The nasal vaccine is an important preventative measure that has been shown empirically to reduce lot of suffering in vulnerable children. This then falls under the well-known category of 'darurah' necessity, required and needed. The Quran teaches: "He has made unlawful for you the carcass, the blood, pork and animals over which any name other than Allah's has been invoked. However, if one is dying of hunger then a small amount can be eaten in order to survive, Allah is Forgiver and Kind." (Al Baqara:173) From this jurist have reasoned that when something that is forbidden is necessary for survival then it becomes permissible. So, if porcine gelatine was forbidden in this situation, it becomes permissible. The other rule from this is: "What is permissible for a particular need can be used according to the amount required."

Thirdly, my fatwa is based on this powerful principle *Istihala* found in books of Fiqh: "*Istihala* means the change of a substance as a result of its purification and the removal of all the impurities around it. Scholars are agreed that when alcohol changes into vinegar it is considered pure. The majority of Hanafi, Maliki scholars and Imam Ahmed said that *istihala* renders impure substance pure. As mentioned above, there is no scholarly contention on the purity of an alcohol that has turned into vinegar. Another example the scholars give is the blood of deer, when it is converted into musk it becomes an expensive fragrance. (p1738 Encyclopaedia of Fatwa published by Dar la Ifta Al-Misriyya)

Considering this evidence, we conclude the nasal flu vaccine containing porcine gelatine is permissible for use.

On behalf of the British Fatwa Council

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