

# COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED ETHICAL SCENARIOS

Using the 8KQ strategy individually and in small groups, think critically about the ethical dimensions of a scenario and the ethical considerations that should go into the decision and discuss. Attempt to make a collective decision after weighing and balancing the considerations.



## THE EIGHT KEY QUESTION STRATEGY

*Designed to disrupt and interrogate quick "biased" intuitions through questions, reflection, and critical thinking at the decision point. The 8KQ curiosity-driven strategy enables people to ask open questions that invite more information when making ethical choices. Best done in groups containing multiple perspectives.*

**Fairness** - how can I (we) act justly, equitably, and balance all legitimate interests?

**Outcomes** - what are the short-term and long-term outcomes of possible actions for everyone?

**Responsibilities** - what duties and obligations apply?

**Character** - what actions will help me become my ideal self? Us become our ideal?

**Liberty** - what issues of freedom and personal autonomy (consent) apply?

**Empathy** - how would I respond if I cared deeply about everyone involved?

**Authority** - what do legitimate authorities (e.g., experts, law, my religion or god) expect?

**Rights** - what rights (e.g., innate, legal, social) apply?

## SCENARIOS

### Vaccine

Assume that within two years an effective (70%) preventative vaccine is developed for the COVID-19 virus. Your team is assigned the task of identifying the populations to whom to provide the first available vaccine. Use the 8KQ to help you to prioritize vaccine delivery to these populations. Identify the top four groups:

18 and under

18-50

50-70 with no preexisting conditions

50-70 with preexisting conditions

70+ with no preexisting conditions

70+ with preexisting conditions

Elder care providers and workers

Essential worker/service providers – e.g. grocery, pharmacy

Federal government – civil service

Federal government – elected

Federal government – military

First Responder – e.g. fire, emergency, police

Medical workers – doctors, nurses, etc.

State government – elected

State government – service providers

Utility workers – water, electric, gas,

## **Meat Production**

Your team operates a large, family-owned meat production facility in the mid-west. You employ 300+ workers. Due to an outbreak of COVID-19 at your plant, 2 workers have died and 87 tested positive of the 160 you have tested so far. You don't have sufficient test kits to test everyone. Workers express their concerns by publicly speaking out and some are staying home from work claiming illness (sick-out). A federal directive comes to you saying that because the meat food supply is essential to the nation, you must order your workers to work. Due to the close, shoulder-to-shoulder working conditions in your plant, the best you can do for worker safety will be inadequate. Decide on your response using the 8KQ.

## **Health Care Rationing**

Severe COVID-19 sometimes produces pneumonia which may require admission to an ICU and being placed on a ventilator. Ventilators are in short supply and a surge in ICU admissions may require rationing. Your citizen team was asked by the local hospital to outline the criteria to be used for responding to overwhelming need and short supply of ventilators. For example, is it permissible to remove a ventilator from someone who shows no progress for recovery and is declining rapidly in order to place a new patient with better prospects of living on the ventilator? Generally, if too many patients arrive at the hospital needing ventilation at the same time and there aren't enough ventilators, who should receive the life-saving equipment first? Use the 8KQ to help to decide the criteria and address the specific question.

First responders – fire, police, EMTs

Medical workers – doctors, nurses, etc.

Patients should be selected in the order in which they arrive

Those 70 and older in greatest need of the life-sustaining ventilators

Those under 70 with the best prospects of survival

Those under 18

## **Voting**

Your group is a politically diverse group of informed citizens in an important swing-state in the 2020 elections. You are asked to decide whether or not to allow mail-in voting in the November 2020 national election. Some argue that democracy comes at a cost and the effort required to go to the polls is a sign of being willing to pay that price. Others argue that going to the polls puts those with pre-existing conditions, the elderly, the poor, and certain minorities who fear being infected at unreasonable health risk. Some argue that using mail ballots opens up risks of fraud and vote tampering. Others contend that there is no evidence of fraud and that mail-in voting increases

democratic participation. Use the 8KQ to determine whether your state should permit mail-in voting for the upcoming election.

### **Facemasks**

You are an American economic delegation in Beijing. Your team leader received a communique from the U.S. Department of State saying that a shipment of N95 facemasks is scheduled to depart the international airport for Germany in two hours. Germany is facing a severe outbreak of COVID-19 and the hospital workers lack facemasks, an essential item in personal protective equipment. The U.S. Department of State tells you to go to the airport as quickly as possible to offer the Chinese distributor double the price for the facemasks. Then, divert the shipment from Germany to New York City where they are also needed. Facemasks are in short supply around the world and Germany apparently saw the need before the U.S. ordering the masks three weeks ago. You realize the dilemma you create for the Chinese distributor and anticipate the response from Germany. Use the 8KQ to help you decide what you should do.

### **McDonald's Safety**

McDonald's in an effort to open its restaurants safely, posts strict rules to allow no one to order food who is not wearing a facemask. A customer comes in with no mask. Your management team asks that they wear a mask while in the restaurant. They protest that they have a constitutional right to come into McDonald's without a mask. Use the 8KQ to identify what you should do.