

Philosophy behind the Covid-19 vaccine  
distribution: is there a proper "scientific" or rational  
approach to this issue?

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# 1 The philosophical problem

Since at the time Covid-19 vaccine doses are limited, the world is faced with a problem: who should the first doses go to? Some say front line and essential workers and some say the elderly. Both choices have rational arguments behind them, but ultimately, in the US, the single state will decide who the vaccine will go to first.

## 1.1 Elderly argument

The argument behind vaccinating the elderly first is that since they are the demographic which has a higher risk of death, vaccinating them first would greatly reduced the total deaths caused by Covid-19. Even though the CDC knows this (as seen in their report [5]), they still suggest that vaccines should be given in this order: *health care workers and those in nursing homes will go first, followed by those 75 and older and front-line essential workers, followed by those 65 and older and other essential workers.*[1] This order suggests that those 75 and older and front-line essential workers are at the same risk, but this is not the case, since *the infection fatality rate for senior citizens is at least 10 times the rate for non-seniors*[2].

The CDC suggest to proceed in this order because elderly people in the US are usually whither, thus vaccinating them first would mean vaccinating more white people first. On top of that, essential and frontline workers are *more racially and socioeconomically diverse*[1].

If this is just or unjust is hard to decide. Should we vaccinate first the demographic with a higher risk of death? In a perfect world, yes, but there are

other factors to take into account when deciding who should receive it first. For example old people are usually whiter because, according to the New York Times: *Society is structured in a way that enables them to live longer. Instead of giving additional health benefits to those who already had more of them, we can start to level the playing field a bit.*[4]

## 1.2 Counter argument

Without deciding if it is right to take ethnicity into account while deciding who should get vaccinated first, Matt Yglesias says that *[talking about giving vaccines to essential workers first] you're not actually saving Black people's lives this way. You're opting for a strategy that leads to more Black deaths and more white deaths than the "vaccinate seniors first" strategy, but deciding that it's better for equity and this is what ethics requires.*[2] He explains how in greater detail in his post on [slowboring.com](https://www.slowboring.com). This is because so many senior citizens are going to die while you vaccinate frontline workers that the total number of black deaths will be higher than vaccinating old people first.

While I understand that senior citizens are whiter in the US because of an imbalance of wealth between races originated from systematic racism, I don't think that in this case we should take vaccinating people first because of their ethnicity into account, simply because it will results in more total deaths. And as Matt Yglesias says, vaccinating elderly people first will results in less deaths for any ethnicity[1].

## 2 Bibliography

### References

- [1] Left wing perspective, from Vox, *Who should get the vaccine first? The debate over a CDC panel's guidelines, explained.*
- [2] Right wing perspective, from Reason, *To Mitigate Racial Inequity, the CDC Wants To Vaccinate Essential Workers Before the Elderly*
- [3] Summary by Noah Smith, an opinionist on Bloomberg, trying to summarize the issue with an open mind, from noahpinion.com, *Vaccine allocation, age, and race*
- [4] From the New York Times, *The Elderly vs. Essential Workers: Who Should Get the Coronavirus Vaccine First?*
- [5] Report made by the CDC on who should the vaccine be given to first, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/meetings/downloads/slides-2020-11/COVID-04-Dooling.pdf>