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NEC Forum

# The Role of Ethics During the Pandemic in Republic of Korea

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# Privacy Protection

- Prevention of epidemics and Protection of Privacy
  - In the initial stage for prevention of COVID-19, Korea did not fully protect personal privacy.
  - For example, media reported the travel route of an anonymized infected person by indicating the places the person had stopped by.
  - People could not identify who the person is.
  - However, it is true that unnecessary information for the prevention of epidemics was informed.

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## Privacy Protection

- Information people want to know is only place and time, not moving route.
- The protection of privacy was not fully observed.
- The reasons are (1) that media was not sensitive to the protection of privacy, and
- (2) that there were so several infected persons that media and people could infer their travel routes.
- Some weeks later media and the authorities became sensitive to the protection of privacy.

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## Privacy Protection

- They report just place and time anonymized infected persons stopped by.
- The information of place and time is informed to residents or travelers by mobile text, which Disaster and Safety Management Office of local government sends.

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## Mask and Culture

- The keys of success in the initial prevention of pandemics in Korea
  - 1) Attitude to wearing a mask
  - As you know, culture related to mask played an important role for the prevention of this pandemics.
  - Koreans do not have any antipathy toward wearing a mask unlike the Western.
  - Koreans have usually worn a mask for the protection from fine dust.

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## Mask and Culture

- 2) Ethical culture in Korea
- Compared to the Western culture, Koreans have not fully developed an individualism.
- Traditional social codes have emphasized the community rather than an individual.
- From ethical perspectives, private good and public good should be balanced.
- However, the prevention of pandemics cannot help giving weight to public good.

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## Mask and Culture

- Korean traditional social codes help to prevent the spread of pandemics.
- In addition, devotional medical teams and thorough and fast epidemiological investigation help the prevention of pandemics in Korea.



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# Vaccination

- The keys of success in vaccination in Korea
  - 1) Korean traditional social codes also help to increase the rate of vaccination.
  - Korea did not start the vaccination early because Korea was late in reserving vaccine.
  - Korea began the vaccination on Feb. 26, 2021.(The Kyunghyang Shinmun 2021.10.24. Last access on 2021.11.18 <https://www.khan.co.kr/opinion/editorial/article/202110242032005>)

# Vaccination

- However, the speed of vaccination is so fast that 78.4% of population has finished the second vaccination on Nov 17, 2021. (KBS NEWS, 2021. 11. 17. <https://news.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=5326981&ref=A>, Last access on 2021.11.18)
- Korean people's concern on the safety of the community may help to increase the speed and rate although some media often reported cases with side effect or cases with bad event after vaccination.

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## Vaccination

- From ethical perspectives, media should have try to report facts with balanced views rather than sensational news to trigger a click.

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## Vaccine Pass

- Vaccine pass
  - Vaccine pass was introduced with limitation on Nov. 15, 2021.
  - This policy is applied to five kinds of crowd facilities.
  - Users of crowd facilities must show QR code, document of the second vaccination, or PCR document of negative result.
  - Some facilities complained of their difficulties. But there is no case to resist the vaccine pass in Korea.

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## Obligation of vaccination

- Obligation of Vaccination
  - There is no news on the legalization of mandatory vaccination in Korea.
  - The high rate of vaccination does not seem to raise the issue of mandatory vaccination.
  - The government also seems to have a careful stance on the mandatory vaccination of children.

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## Conflict of private values and public values

- Vicious circle
  - From ethical perspectives, there is a vicious circle in policies related to pandemics.
  - When an individual voluntarily concerns the safety of his or her community, the prevention of epidemics is likely to succeed.
  - However, when an individual does not, there is a vicious circle in the prevention. Antipathy of wearing a mask may hinder preventive measures.

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## Conflict of private values and public values

- The low rate of vaccination seems to make a government consider the introduction of mandatory vaccination.

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## Conflict of private values and public values

- Ethics of a citizen
  - Private values and public values should be balanced.
  - An individual lives a life in a community. The risk of the community causes that of an individual.
  - Pandemics is one of a critical threat to the community.
  - Citizen has the ethical obligation to concern the safety of the community.



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## Conflict of private values and public values

- Ethics of a government
  - A government has an ethical and political obligation to support an individual as well as to take preventive measures and provide vaccination.
  - However, Korean government does not quickly and fully provide financial and monetary aids to small business, which has been restricted in business hours for the prevention of pandemics.

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## Conflict of private values and public values

### ■ Ethics of a state

- Pandemics is not just a problem to each state. It is a global problem.
- WHO points out that inequity in providing vaccine should be resolved, saying “no one is safe from COVID-19 until everyone is safe.” (WHO, “Vaccine Equity,” Last access on 2021. 11. 18. <https://www.who.int/campaigns/vaccine-equity>)

# Conflict of private values and public values

## ■ Ethics of a state

- UNESCO IBC and COMEST “calls for COVID-19 vaccines to be considered a global public good.”

(UNESCO IBC & COMEST, “Joint Statement of UNESCO’s Ethics Commissions on Ensuring Equal Access for All to Vaccines and Therapeutics Developed to Confront COVID-19”, 2021.9.21. UNESCO IBC & COMEST, “UNESCO’S Ethics Commissions’ Call for Global Vaccines Equity and Solidarity”, 2021. 2. 24.)

- Each state has an ethical obligation to support developing countries’ vaccination and to cooperate one another.

Thank you.

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