



ADVANCING AMERICAN FREEDOM

COVID-Era Vaccine Mandates Came with A Deadly Human Cost

Topline: The COVID-19 vaccines developed by the Trump-Pence administration's Operation Warp Speed saved millions of lives worldwide. However, the *mandating* of those same vaccines may ultimately cost an untold number of lives for reasons wholly unrelated to COVID. Congress should adopt policies that accelerate the availability of life-saving healthcare and empower families to make their own decisions.

Background

- Heavy-handed approaches taken by leaders in both the public and private sectors fueled skepticism and resistance among a significant portion of the population. Mandates that forced individuals to choose between their livelihoods and (an often unnecessary) vaccination bred a sense of resentment, hindering the very goal they sought to achieve.
- Data is starting to come out that shows COVID-19 vaccine mandates caused a massive erosion of trust in ALL vaccines. The ripple effect is evident in the alarming decline of vaccination rates for other preventable diseases, like measles, mumps, rubella (MMR), diphtheria, tetanus, and polio.
 - In 2023, the CDC reported the highest vaccine exemption rate ever recorded.
 - Vaccine skepticism has skyrocketed especially among Republicans, who are most likely to be skeptical of government mandates to begin with. Pew Research found a sharp decline in support for MMR vaccine requirements among Republicans, from 79% pre-pandemic to 57% in March 2023.

Significance

- Jesse Terk, a Texas pediatrician, lamented the challenges he faces in convincing parents to vaccinate their children, warning: "It's becoming much more challenging for me to convince people to get their kids vaccinated. We will become reacquainted with some of these diseases that we thought were relegated to history."
- The government must recalibrate its approach to public health moving forward. Respect for individual choice, personal liberty, and conscientious objection must be restored. Debates about vaccine safety and efficacy should be tolerated in the name of free speech. Health officials, agencies, and experts should focus on rebuilding their own tattered reputations. Only then will they be able to rebuild trust in the vaccines we need for a healthier and more resilient society.

Solutions

- Policies like the *Allowing Military Exemptions, Recognizing Individual Concerns About New Shots [AMERICANS] Act* (H.R. 453 / S. 29), which would reinstate and provide backpay to military servicemembers who lost their jobs for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine, could help mitigate the fallout from excessive pandemic-era responses.
- The *REINS Act* (H.R. 277 / S. 184) and other policies to deregulate and check excessive rulemaking will ensure that the U.S. remains a superpower for medical innovation.

The path forward on public health is American freedom and innovation, not tyrannical government mandates. You can read more in the American Opportunity section of our Freedom Agenda.

Resources

- CDC Reports Highest Childhood Vaccine Exemption Rate Ever ([NBC](#))
- How distrust of childhood vaccines could lead to more breakouts ([AAMC](#))
- American Opportunity, The Freedom Agenda ([Advancing American Freedom](#))