

# Florida's Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo allows children with measles to attend school

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On the heels of the national alert issued to health systems by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last month on outbreaks of measles across several states, Broward County, Florida, health officials confirmed six measles cases had been detected this week at Manatee Bay Elementary School, located 20 miles west of Fort Lauderdale.

Measles is a highly contagious airborne disease with serious and potentially lethal consequences for those who contract it. These include high fevers, need for hospitalization, and a very small (1 in 1,000) risk of brain injury and (3 in 1,000) risk of death. The World Health Organization (WHO) has set vaccination herd immunity levels at 95 percent to prevent forward transmission of measles. Anyone without immunity who is exposed to an infectious person stands more than a 90 percent chance of contracting the virus.

According to Florida's department of health, less than 92 percent of kindergarten-aged children in Broward County were fully vaccinated in 2022. A Broward County vaccine report on the present academic year notes that 23 schools at the kindergarten level fell below 80 percent of fully vaccinated students. According to a *CBS News* report from earlier this month, home-schooled children and those attending private or charter schools ranked in the bottom nine out of 165 on the county list of vaccination rates. For Manatee Bay Elementary, less than 90 percent were fully immunized for the current calendar year. This means that more than 100 students are susceptible.

From a public health perspective, this is considered a low vaccination rate and underscores the dangers posed by the anti-vaccination trends that are being promoted by various reactionary groups and the fascistic elements within the political spectrum, which have an epicenter in Florida with its fascistic governor Ron DeSantis and

his acolyte surgeon general, the Harvard-educated quack Dr. Joseph Ladapo.

Ladapo has employed pseudo-scientific chicanery to minimize the dangers posed by COVID-19 and made openly false statements about the dangers of anti-COVID vaccines. He has used the powers invested in him by the state to not lift a finger in what amounts to a legitimate public health threat. Just last month, Ladapo called for halting the use of mRNA COVID vaccines.

In a letter to parents and guardians dated February 20, 2024, after informing them about the "cluster of measles cases" identified at Manatee Bay Elementary, he stated, "Due to the high immunity rate in the community, as well as the burden on families and educational cost of healthy children missing schools, the department of health is *deferring to parents or guardians to make decision about school attendance*" (emphasis added).

In order to keep students and the public safe and break the chains of transmission, a sound public health policy would send all unvaccinated and undervaccinated children home to isolate until health officials deem the outbreak over while ensuring that they are fully vaccinated as quickly as possible. Given the long incubation period that can last for at least three full weeks, contingencies have to be made to support the community in these circumstances. Should another measles case be detected at the elementary school, this will only set the clock back for all who do not have immunity against measles.

This abrogation of responsibility and *deferring* complex public health decisions to the *whim* of parents is simply criminal negligence that endangers the population of Broward County and Florida. It is entirely in keeping with the demands by finance capital and the policy of "forever COVID" that no future

public health crisis will impede the normal course of commerce. Under capitalism, children must attend school so their parents can be at work producing corporate profits, regardless of the dangers posed by to them by these respiratory pathogens.

On hearing of Florida's response, Jason Schwartz, associate professor of health policy at the Yale School of Public Health, told *STAT News*:

This is pretty stunning public health guidance to get from a state health commissioner in 2024. And it would be absolutely baffling to see if it wasn't frankly so consistent with the kinds of things we've seen and heard from ... this office over the past few years. It's the latest in a sort of series of actions and statements that all seem to minimize the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases.

It is also the latest in a series of political and legalistic maneuvers that have attempted to dismantle the principles of scientific thought stemming from the Enlightenment and centuries of scientific discoveries that have given modern life its longevity and well-being. The recent ruling by Alabama's Supreme Court to recognize frozen embryos as a person under state law and declare the supremacy of religion over secular life, in contradiction to the constitution and Bill of Rights, is a testament to the utter bankruptcy of capitalism in its terminal state.

As Thursday's *World Socialist Web Site* perspective on the Alabama ruling correctly stated,

The Alabama ruling will resonate with religious fanatics opposed to the separation of church and state and anti-vaccines, anti-science demagogues like Robert F. Kennedy Jr. They feel they can run amok with the backing of the US Supreme Court and the spinelessness of the Democratic Party and the Biden Administration...

But for the working class, the attack on abortion rights and other elements of reproductive freedom, such as in vitro

fertilization and contraception, must be seen as a deadly threat to democratic rights, and workers must act accordingly.

These also apply to protecting the well-being of communities against not just novel pathogens, but previously checked viruses with safe and highly effective vaccines and treatments.

The attack on the sciences, including the basic foundational comprehension of life, is an attack on the gains made by the working class in defense of its own interests. It is an attack on the theoretical underpinning of mass consciousness and the revolutionary perspective that the world is knowable, understandable and changeable. These reactionary developments opposed to vaccines and public health in general are counterrevolutionary attacks aimed precisely at the working class.

Globally, over 61 million doses of measles-containing vaccines were postponed or missed from 2020 to 2022. The World Health Organization said this week that half the world's countries will soon be at high or very high risk of measles outbreak. The WHO's Senior Technical Adviser on Measles and Rubella, Natasha Crowcroft, said at the press briefing in Geneva, "What we are worried about is this year, 2024, we've got these big gaps in our immunization programs and if we don't fill them really quickly with the vaccine, measles will jump into that gap."

In 2023, global measles cases were up 64 percent, while deaths rose 43 percent. Many scientists have called the virus that produces measles the "inequity virus" because it will find and attack those least protected. However, rather than implementing an international program that consolidates resources to address these most urgent problems, billions are being raised to continue to prosecute the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East and fund the genocide in Gaza.



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