

Florida state government to bar vaccine mandates for all childhood diseases

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Florida Surgeon General Dr. Joseph Ladapo announced Wednesday that the state government would move to eliminate all vaccine requirements for school children, forcing millions of parents to send their children to school with a growing number of unvaccinated classmates, and threatening to revive diseases like measles, mumps, rubella and polio, long held in check.

Ladapo, a Harvard graduate turned anti-vaccine crusader, stood beside Republican Governor Ron DeSantis at a press conference in Tampa. The venue, a private Christian high school, underscored the deeply reactionary content of the new policy, which suppresses science in favor of religious obscurantism and political prejudice.

The DeSantis-Ladapo agenda aligns Florida squarely with HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s "Make America Healthy Again" campaign, which is in fact a war against science and public health that threatens a devastating toll from preventable childhood hospitalizations and deaths.

Instead of speaking as a physician or scientist, Ladapo sounded like a preacher or snake-oil salesman. On school vaccine mandates, he declared: "Every last one of them is wrong and drips with disdain and slavery. Who am I to tell you what your child should put in their body? I don't have that right. Your body is a gift from God."

This is not just religious claptrap—it is the "big lie" of American fascism. Public health officials are not "slave masters." They are sworn to protect lives, prevent illness, and reduce disability. Vaccines and antibiotics remain among the most powerful, science-based tools in medicine. The record is undeniable: routine childhood vaccinations prevent four million deaths every year worldwide. And a recent *Lancet* study estimated that over the past fifty years, vaccines have saved 154 million lives.

According to a 2024 report published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "among children born during 1994–2023, routine childhood vaccinations will have prevented approximately 508 million cases of illness, 32 million hospitalizations, and 1,129,000 deaths, resulting in direct savings of \$540 billion and societal savings of \$2.7

trillion."

That's why expert bodies like the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), and virtually every major medical organization call vaccination one of medicine's greatest success stories. From their perspective, tearing down mandates doesn't advance "freedom"—it undermines decades of progress in protecting children from deadly diseases.

Perhaps most egregious is Ladapo's open disregard for the lives of Floridians, dressed up in a jumble of slogans. Life-saving health care is "slavery." Orwell's "Big Brother" couldn't have phrased it better. This framing of vaccines as mere "personal choice" or "medical freedom" borrows directly from anti-communist and "free market" playbooks.

Margaret Thatcher once declared that there is no such thing as society. Unfortunately viruses and bacteria do not follow that precept. They do their deadly work, infecting host after host, unless society—humankind—works on the basis of medical science to fight back.

One foul political aim of the fascist campaign against vaccination is to redirect public anger over social crises away from Wall Street and Washington and toward public health officials and scientists. This rhetoric only plays into the hand of reaction playing out against the backdrop of the COVID pandemic, a crisis that continues to shape life for millions in the U.S. and around the world.

Ladapo has already made clear that some vaccine mandates can be wiped out without any vote in the state legislature. These are the requirements set by the health department's rules, not state law. By his own account, about "a half-dozen" vaccines fall into this category, and as he bluntly put it: "Those are gone."

Ladapo and DeSantis did not specify which vaccine mandates would be immediately scrapped. But based on Florida's own guidelines, the chickenpox (varicella), hepatitis B, Hib, and pneumococcal vaccines fall under health department rules rather than state law, making them first on the chopping block.

DeSantis added that Ladapo will work with legislators when the state legislature reconvenes in January 2026 to push a broader package. That package would target the statutes that explicitly require K-12 students to be immunized against polio, diphtheria, measles, mumps, rubella, pertussis and tetanus in order to attend school (with exemptions already available for medical or religious reasons). Eliminating those mandates would require rewriting state law by first passing bills in both chambers and then securing the governor's signature, which is more than assured.

Beyond scrapping school immunization laws, the DeSantis-Ladapo "medical freedom package" is expected to go further by locking in bans on COVID-19 vaccine and mask mandates and expanding them. Health experts warn it will likely also bar schools or local governments from ever imposing new vaccine requirements without the legislature's approval, effectively tying the hands of future public health officials.

Unsurprisingly, the press conference triggered immediate backlash from medical experts and public health leaders. Dr. Michael Osterholm called the announcement "reckless," warning: "Every parent of a child who dies or is hospitalized with a vaccine-preventable disease will know exactly why."

Dr. Susan Kressly, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), said she was "concerned that today's announcement... will put children in Florida public schools at higher risk for getting sick." She reminded the public that when everyone in a school is vaccinated, diseases struggle to spread, keeping classrooms open and children safe. The Florida chapter of the AAP, joined by other physician groups that have long opposed efforts to weaken vaccine rules, stressed that this move could undo decades of hard-won progress in child health.

Today's announcement in Florida is part of a larger social breakdown—the barbaric erosion of democratic norms in the United States. The violent attack on the CDC headquarters in Atlanta was not a random outburst. It was the direct outcome of a climate of mistrust, stoked by politicized rhetoric and anti-vaccine propaganda. On August 8, 2025, a right-wing gunman, radicalized by fascist propaganda against the COVID vaccine, shot and killed a police officer before turning the gun on himself.

Hundreds of health workers at HHS responded with a sharp rebuke in the form of a letter to Kennedy. They warned that the attack came amid "growing mistrust in public institutions, driven by politicized rhetoric that has turned public health professionals from trusted experts into targets of villainization—and now, violence." They accused Kennedy of being "complicit in dismantling America's public health infrastructure and endangering the nation's

health by repeatedly spreading inaccurate health information."

Rather than address the roots of the crisis, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. escalated his purge of public health agencies, what can be construed as a "coup against science." Less than a month after the CDC attack, Kennedy forced out CDC Director Susan Monarez, a career scientist. Monarez was threatened with dismissal after objecting to his plans to suppress critical vaccines and refusing to "rubber-stamp unscientific, reckless directives." Her attorneys said she "chose protecting the public over serving a political agenda." Her ouster sparked a wave of resignations from senior officials, including the CDC's chief medical officer and the directors of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases and the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases.

The purge has spread beyond the CDC, signaling a wider effort to silence dissent across federal health agencies. Dr. Paul Offit, a leading and trusted vaccine scientist, co-inventor of the rotavirus vaccine, and one of Kennedy's most outspoken critics, was abruptly removed from the FDA's vaccine advisory committee. After eight years of service and an offer of a two-year extension, HHS informed him without explanation that his services were "no longer required."

Experts like Dr. Peter Hotez see the move as part of Kennedy's strategy to "remove those who are qualified and vaccine experts and replace them with unqualified ideologues or those who promote pseudoscience." Offit himself had called for Kennedy's resignation after Kennedy falsely claimed the measles vaccine causes blindness and deafness. His dismissal makes clear that Kennedy is not just targeting agencies; he is targeting the scientists who refuse to echo his propaganda.

Public health is not about isolated individuals—it is about the health of society as a whole. A functioning society cannot be reduced to the whims of financial oligarchs or the illusion of total independence; it is an organism that survives only through cooperation. Scientific public health has always recognized this truth: that vaccines, clean water, and collective action protect us all. That framework is now under assault, and with it, the very principle that society must act together to defend life. Herein lies one component of the broader class-struggle that is coming to the fore.



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