

Florida’s “Charlatan General” Ladapo reveals no scientific evidence supported anti-vaccine policy

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Florida Surgeon General Dr. Joseph Ladapo appeared Sunday on CNN’s State of the Union to explain and defend the state government’s decision to eliminate all vaccine mandates. What he said left the program host Jake Tapper slack-jawed in amazement and enraged medical professionals who watched or learned of his comments.

Last Wednesday, September 3, Ladapo and Governor Ron DeSantis announced at a press conference held at a private religious high school that several vaccine mandates established by health department rules—rather than by statute—would be scrapped immediately. These include requirements for chickenpox (varicella), hepatitis B, Hib, and pneumococcal vaccines, which Ladapo described flatly as “gone.” Other vaccine mandates would be repealed by the Republican-controlled state legislature when it reconvenes early in 2026.

When Tapper asked whether Ladapo’s office had conducted any data analysis on the likely impact of removing mandates, given rising numbers of hepatitis A, whooping cough and chickenpox in Florida. Ladapo replied bluntly: “Absolutely not.” No analysis was necessary, he argued, because it was the absolute right of parents to decide what goes into their children’s bodies. He dismissed Tapper’s citing public health concerns by saying Florida manages outbreaks “all the time” and pointing to Sweden and the United Kingdom—countries without school vaccine mandates—as examples where “the sky isn’t falling.”

If the new policies are enacted, Florida would become the first state to dismantle requirements that have long been a cornerstone of public health in preventing infectious diseases. The proposal has drawn widespread condemnation from medical and public health experts. Ladapo has been accused of promoting “pseudo-scientific chicanery” and “scientific nonsense” while endangering the lives of Florida’s children.

Ladapo admits that the anti-mandate policy is not based on scientific studies—such as those that have shown that for

extremely contagious diseases like measles, a vaccination rate of 95 percent or higher is required. It is instead based on a libertarian or religious dogma upholding parental rights.

This ideological construct stands the concept of “freedom” on its head. It denies parents the right to protect their children through vaccination and other public health policies. These parents are forced to send their children to schools with unvaccinated children who may transmit a serious or even life-threatening illness to them. The parents who withhold vaccinations are not exercising a parental right over their own children; they are exercising a “right to infect” the children of others.

Tapper seemed stunned by Ladapo’s brazen defense of a “right to infect.” He noted that Ladapo’s position contradicts the recommendations of “every top medical organization,” including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. He highlighted the danger to immunocompromised children who rely on herd immunity to remain safe at school. Ladapo responded with platitudes about children with disabilities but clung to the extreme notion of absolute parental rights (although only for those with anti-vaccine beliefs)—even in the face of a deadly pandemic.

Ladapo’s record demonstrates that he practices what he preaches. In 2024, during a measles outbreak in Weston, Florida, he allowed unvaccinated children to attend school, openly rejecting established public health guidance. The year before, he urged Floridians to “stay clear” of updated mRNA COVID-19 boosters, repeating unsubstantiated claims about their safety and effectiveness despite clinical data.

In 2023, both the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention rebuked Ladapo for “incorrect, misleading and harmful” misuse of the federal VAERS reporting system (Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System). They stressed that serious adverse events are rare and far outweighed by vaccine benefits. That same

year, Ladapo was also found to have altered study data to exaggerate health risks of COVID-19 vaccines for young men.

Appearing after him, Dr. Paul Offit, pediatrician, virologist and co-inventor of the rotavirus vaccine, immediately rebutted Ladapo's claims. Offit stressed that Florida already offers religious exemptions and that eliminating mandates would strip away essential tools for controlling outbreaks, crippling the state's ability to manage epidemics. Notably, Offit himself was recently ousted from the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) by HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the last expert voice on that body who consistently defended scientifically grounded vaccine policy.

Offit expressed shock at Ladapo's admission that no data analysis had been conducted, warning that such an attitude will inevitably lead to preventable outbreaks. The interview vividly highlighted the collision between established public health principles and the so-called "medical freedom" agenda advanced by Ladapo and Kennedy. That agenda has already included Kennedy's firing of CDC Director Susan Monarez after she resisted demands to rubber-stamp an ACIP agenda placing MMR, Hepatitis B and COVID vaccines up for review.

The alarming policy shifts in Florida come as statewide vaccination coverage continues to decline. Kindergarten immunization rates for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) stood at just 88.7 percent in 2025, below the national average of 92 percent and well under the 95 percent threshold for herd immunity. Among two-year-olds, the percentage of fully immunized dropped from 85.5 percent less than a decade ago to 75.7 percent in 2024.

Taken together with the push to abolish mandates, Florida is veering toward a de facto "right to choose infection" regime—a direct break from more than a century of US public health law and practice. If mandates are repealed entirely, the state will almost certainly face a resurgence of measles, pertussis and chickenpox outbreaks, bringing avoidable hospitalizations and child deaths, and turning Florida into a national cautionary tale.

It should be recognized that the legal and medical communities in the United States have long defended vaccination not as unwarranted coercion but as a necessary exercise of public health authority. Compulsory (and not coercive) vaccination laws have consistently been upheld as legitimate expressions of state police power in defense of the common good.

In *Jacobson v. Massachusetts* (1905), the Supreme Court affirmed the state's authority to require smallpox vaccination during an epidemic, ruling that individual liberty is not absolute when it endangers community health. That

precedent was reinforced in *Zucht v. King* (1922), which upheld school vaccination requirements and confirmed that health officials possess broad discretion to enforce them. Together, these decisions established that vaccination mandates are constitutionally valid tools for safeguarding society, not arbitrary infringements on personal freedom.

At the same time, organized opposition has sought to exploit the language of liberty and individual rights in the same way that reactionary movements have sought to suppress workers' struggles in the name of business "freedom," and opposed the civil rights movement as an infringement on the "freedom" of bigots to engage in racial discrimination.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, business leaders like John Pitcairn Jr. and Charles M. Higgins poured resources into anti-vaccine leagues, pamphlets and repeal campaigns, casting public health measures as "medical tyranny." Critics claimed vaccines were unsafe, sometimes even comparing mandates to slavery or unconstitutional seizures of children, words used by Ladapo during his press conference.

By elevating individual choice above the social aspects of our common humanity and preservation of community safety (which have historical precedence in human civilization), anti-vaccine leaders have portrayed public health itself as oppressive. These dynamics persist today. The same arguments about inviolable freedom and "medical liberty" continue to animate opposition to vaccines, even in the face of scientific advances like mRNA technology. It matters not one iota to them how many millions of lives vaccines have saved in the last five decades.

Public health is a social right, fought for by the working class and principled scientists over two centuries. It is grounded in the recognition that society functions as a collective organism, not a loose assemblage of individuals or the property of financial elites. Effective vaccination, which requires mandates, has flourished as one of medicine's greatest achievements. Ladapo's comments on CNN show the reactionary and retrogressive character of the fascistic movement headed by Trump, which seeks to roll back all the progressive achievements associated with both the development of science and technology and the struggles of the working class.



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