

Achieving Population Immunity Against the COVID-19 Threat

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Dear Editor,

The commentary by Teixeira da Silva in the *Oman Medical Journal*¹ weighs the cost of personal freedom against the most direct pathway to population immunity against the COVID-19 threat: mandatory vaccination. In no country has this battle between the antivaxxers and the health experts been more pronounced than in the US.² As of October 31, 2021, the US has 57% of its population fully vaccinated, while Canada has 74%, Japan 72%, Italy 71%, France 68%, the UK 67%, Germany 66%, and Russia 33%.³ Among the G-8 nations, only Russia ranks lower than the US in terms of percentage of population fully vaccinated.

While vaccine mandates are certainly a polarizing issue, there comes a point at which common sense prevails. A point at which personal freedom is subsumed by the greater, larger good to the population as a whole. We are at that point in our COVID-19 journey, which, as of November 2021, has taken almost 5 million of our loved ones from the planet.⁴ Around the globe, families are at war over vaccine mandates. On air flights, we see daily confrontations. While Teixeira da Silva¹ presents two sides to this COVID-19 conundrum, in reality, there may be only one.

This is a reality that President Biden acknowledged in September 2021, in his announcement of a COVID-19 vaccine mandate. Biden's mandate requires that all employers with 100 or more employees ensure their workers are vaccinated against COVID-19 or tested weekly; it requires COVID-19 vaccinations for over 17 million health care workers at Medicare and Medicaid participating hospitals and other health care settings; it requires 300,000 educators in federal Head Start programs to be vaccinated. It calls on large entertainment venues to require proof of vaccination or testing for entry; it requires employers provide paid time off for employees to get vaccinated.⁵

While Biden's mandate is increasing vaccinations, it is doing so with political contention. The state health department of Florida has called for a permanent school mask mandate ban.⁶ The governor of Oklahoma is challenging Biden over employer vaccine mandates.⁷ The governor of Texas issued a vaccine mandate ban, which failed to pass state legislature.⁸ Anti-vaccine protests have been staged in Melbourne, Rome, and New York, and a multitude of boroughs in between. California students and their families staged a statewide walkout in October, in response to an upcoming vaccine mandate.⁹ Protests have been logged at Boeing, Southwest, American, United, and Qantas Airlines, in response to vaccine mandates.

Nonetheless, amid the chaos and confusion, more people are receiving vaccinations. Moreover, fewer than expected are sacrificing jobs, home, and family, on the pretense of 'personal freedom.'¹⁰ As empirical evidence supports the efficacy of vaccine mandates, the route to get there should not be overthought. For some people, personal freedoms will be compromised; but for the species, the future will be brighter. Thus, when considering loss of freedom, and its importance in our life, we should weigh the benefit of the greater good.^{11,12}

Conflicts of interest

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Author's contributions

The author contributed to all aspects of the paper.

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