

## THE AUSTRALIAN

# Vaccine mandates set us on path towards segregation and despotism

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Vaccine mandates are a terrible mistake. They are illiberal. They segregate members of society, jettisoning equality before the law.

To be remotely defensible, the disease against which they are aimed should surely be very lethal indeed, like the Spanish flu or the Black Death. Yet Covid-19 comes nowhere near the level of lethality needed to justify what amounts to a huge inroad into the basic standards of a functioning liberal democracy.

If your inclination is to support mandates, remember this: for those who catch Covid-19 and who are not vaccinated, 99.7 per cent survive. For those under 50, you'll get about one death for every 50,000 people who catch it. This virus is dangerous, but it is selectively dangerous. If you are over 80, or obese, or have a number of comorbidities, then look out.

Of course all of those dangers diminish with widespread vaccination. But the question here is whether you wish to throw away the core elements of living in a liberal democracy to move towards soft despotism and soft segregationism – whether you support segregating certain people, thereby making it impossible for them to work or go to entertainment venues or do much other than eat – for a disease with that level of danger. I certainly do not. I think it's disgraceful. And to be clear, I have been double vaccinated.

I never imagined a day would come when almost everyone in the public-health hierarchy would be chanting “group benefits should trump any and all individual decision-making calls”. Yet that is precisely what the doctorly caste (and their enablers in the political class) are proposing, however they try to disguise it.

For that to make sense, first there needs to be clear evidence that unvaccinated people are considerably more likely to transmit Covid than the vaccinated. You won't hear this much in the media, but there is no such evidence. Indeed, most of the recent studies point the other way. A November Yale study concluded “clinicians and public health practitioners should consider vaccinated persons who become infected with SARS-CoV-2 to be no less infectious than unvaccinated persons”.

One in the scientific journal Nature showed the effectiveness of vaccines in reducing transmission fades to practically zero after three months. In heavily vaccinated Germany, things are worse on all metrics in 2021 than in 2020, when there were no vaccines.

The latest UK Health Security Agency surveillance reports of hospital admissions, while showing the vaccinated do significantly better, also show the vaccinated can still be infected, pass on infection, become ill and die. They make up 52 per cent of hospital admissions and 73 per cent of deaths. The real-world data – not computer modelling – gives evidence for personal protection but provides no reason for supporting vaccine apartheid.

And for those for whom credentialism is the be-all and end-all, this position is supported by professors, epidemiologists and doctors from the likes of Oxford, Harvard and Stanford (check out the signatories to the Great Barrington Declaration) who put to shame the qualifications of the chief health officer types here in Australia.

Leave aside the real questions about the effectiveness of lockdowns, though I believe they were a terrible error and will be seen that way in the next few years. Sweden, which never locked down, now shows that its age-adjusted excess deaths through this pandemic are below the rolling 2015-19 average. And its Covid rate is down in the bottom half in Europe. Deaths due to lockdowns are starting to become plain and will dwarf those saved by lockdowns. Meanwhile, of the 50 US states, right now the one with the lowest Covid rates is Florida – a state with no mask rules for the past 10 months or so, no vaccine mandate, no lockdowns and indeed a mandate against vaccine mandates. The other no-vaccine mandate US states are outperforming the mandate states.

This is the bottom line for anyone who cares for freedom, civil liberties and living in a country with equality before the law.

The facts are now clear that the gains (if any) from heavy-handed vaccine mandates (that would cost people jobs and severely affect dissenting students) are so marginal that they patently do not justify the restriction of liberty.

Moreover, once we have started down a path on which tiny gains in public health do justify the suspension of our liberties, that opens the door to many more restrictions in return for other supposed benefits. You have to have heroic levels of trust in government to think mandates are a good idea, especially now it is plain that the overwhelming benefit of the vaccine flows to those who take it for a few months per shot, and almost none to bystanders. Remember, Omicron was spread rapidly all over the world solely by the fully vaccinated and masked-while-flying travellers, as only they could travel internationally during this time.

Vaccine mandates amount to terrible, illiberal public policy. The government says it is against such mandates but it takes virtually no concrete steps to put its money where its mouth is, preferring weasel-word formulations about leaving it to businesses to decide.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis knew this was a bogus formulation and acted accordingly. But even if you buy the Morrison line, look at all the things of which the federal government is the main funder – think universities, the public service, the military and more.

Will the government prohibit all of these from bringing in vaccine mandates? Because right now Coalition MPs who say they are against vaccine mandates are not leaving cabinet on the issue, not speaking out for action, not criticising businesses or states. They're not walking the walk, just murmuring a bit of cheap talk.

I'll say it again. Vaccine mandates are a terrible, illiberal, slippery-slope idea. Speak now or forever expect despotic, heavy-handed government.

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