

Achieving Population Immunity Against the COVID-19 Threat

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Dear Editor,

The commentary by Teixeira da Silva published 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 anti-vaxxers and the health experts been more pronounced than in the United States of America.² As of 31 October 2021, the US has 57% of its population fully vaccinated, while Canada has 74%, Japan 72%, Italy 71%, France 68%, 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 the population fully vaccinated.

While vaccine mandates are certainly a polarizing issue, there comes the point at which common sense prevails. A point at which the greater, larger good subsumes personal freedom. 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 healthcare workers

at Medicare and Medicaid-participating hospitals and other healthcare settings and 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 and it requires employers to provide paid time off for employees to get vaccinated.⁵

While Biden's mandate is increasing vaccinations, it does 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 the state legislature.⁸ Anti-vaccine protests have been staged in Melbourne, Rome, and New York, and a multitude of boroughs in between. In October, California students and their families staged a statewide walkout 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 freedom will be compromised; but the future will be brighter for the species. Thus, when considering the loss of liberty, and its importance in our life, we should weigh the benefit of the greater good.^{11,12}

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