



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on June 14, 2019

New York Ends Religious Exemptions for Vaccines Amid Measles Panic

New York is the most recent state to impose a stricter compulsory immunization policy.

The state's lawmakers on Thursday [passed legislation](#) that eliminates religious exemptions to vaccinations for schoolchildren. Democrat Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the bill just minutes after it made its way through both the Assembly and the Senate.



Proponents of the legislation painted the bill as a response to what many mainstream media outlets are calling “the nation’s worst measles outbreak in decades.”

Governor Cuomo called the outbreak a public health emergency and asserted that public health trumps religious liberties. “While I understand and respect freedom of religion, our first job is to protect the public health,” he said.

Assemblyman Kenneth Zebrowski, a Rockland County Democrat, argued that his county alone had 266 confirmed measles cases and over a dozen hospitalizations — which prompted his family to accelerate vaccinations for his one-year-old daughter.

“Our job is not just to react to epidemics,” said Zebrowski prior to his “yes” vote. “Our job as legislators is to prevent epidemics.”

Most of the measles cases have occurred in Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn and Rockland County. Opponents of the bill were vocal at the Assembly vote, where cries of “shame” descended from the gallery after the legislation passed 77-53. It went on to pass 36-26 in the Senate.

The hundreds of protesters at the New York Capitol included children, families, and member of the state’s religious community.

Stan Yung, a Long Island father, [said](#) he is considering moving his family out of state because his Russian Orthodox views keep him from vaccinating his children. “People came to this country to get away from exactly this kind of stuff,” Yung explained.

Democrat Jeffrey Dinowitz, the bill’s sponsor in the Assembly, shot back at claims that compulsory vaccination infringes on religious freedom. “I’m not aware of anything in the Torah, the Bible, the Koran or anything else that suggests you should not get vaccinated,” Dinowitz stated. “If you choose to not vaccinate your child, therefore potentially endangering other children ... then you’re the one choosing not to send your children to school.”

The law will not eliminate exemptions for children who cannot receive vaccines for medical reasons, such as a weakened immune system.

With the new legislation, New York joins California, Arizona, West Virginia, Mississippi, and Maine



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among states that do not allow vaccine exemptions on religious grounds.

California removed its exemptions in 2015 following a measles outbreak at Disneyland that affected 147 people. The state is currently considering legislation that would tighten medical exemptions by requiring them to be issued by a state public health officer rather than a doctor.

On [Instagram](#), Biel wrote that while she supports vaccines, she opposes SB 276 because it would interfere with parents' "right to make educated medical decisions for their children alongside their physicians."

Following the signing of the immunization bill in New York on Thursday, the American Medical Association stated it would increase its efforts to "incentivize states to eliminate nonmedical exemptions." It also vowed to support legislation allowing minors to request vaccines without their parents' consent.

Also on Thursday, the New York City Health Department [shut down](#) two Jewish schools for failing to comply with an order to keep unvaccinated children away.

New York City Mayor Bill De Blasio formerly called for misdemeanor charges and \$1,000 fine on anyone who refuses a measles vaccine in response to measles cases in Brooklyn's Orthodox Jewish community.

While much of the energy to establish mandatory vaccination comes from the recent measles "outbreak," most measles cases are not severe. And although the media frequently remarks that the disease was declared eliminated in 2000, there have been over [100 confirmed cases](#) of measles most years since 2008.

As *The New American* previously reported, there were no deaths from measles between 2003 and 2015 (even with 667 confirmed cases in 2014), but there were 100 child deaths linked to the measles vaccine, which contains a live virus.

While mandatory vaccination advocates treat all shots as infallible, the truth is that vaccines, like any other medication, carry risks.

The varicella vaccine, for example, has caused nearly 4,000 adverse effects as of mid-2018, including 200 deaths (most of whom were children under six). All that for an illness (chicken pox) with a mortality rate of 0.003 percent that most families used to see as a harmless, if inconvenient, part of growing up.

The tactics being employed by the compulsory vaccination movement are typical of those who strive to grow government power. Fomenting fear is the best way to convince the average citizen to surrender his freedoms.

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