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## Is Mandatory Vaccination Ethically Justified?

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## Is Mandatory Vaccination Ethically Justified?

Vaccination has gained top position in terms of effective public health intervention, and millions of deaths have been prevented. Nevertheless, with the proposal of vaccine mandates, especially in the context of COVID-19, the ethical concern related to the question of individual freedom, governmental power, and societal accountability has somewhat reemerged. Even though vaccination is generally recognized as health-positive, mandatory vaccination raises the issue of coercion and integrity. Mandatory vaccination is ethically justified, however, only in the presence of a serious threat to the health of the population, the effectiveness of vaccinations is confirmed, voluntary efforts have not produced sufficient outcomes, and the mandates are balanced, focused, and deferential to personal autonomy.

Compulsory vaccination may be ethically acceptable provided that the need to safeguard the health of the population exists, as well as compulsory means are reasonable and supported by evidence. State interventions to curb individual liberty are legitimate in the ethical context of public health to restrict the harm caused to others; hence, the harm principle permits the regulation of actions that risk causing severe harm, especially during highly transmissible epidemics. Additionally, Williams (2022) proves that requiring people at the greatest exposure to serious illnesses to be vaccinated is ethically justifiable since immunization not only saves people but also alleviates the burden on the healthcare system. As a result, such mandates do not have to be universal to be justified; specific, mediated policies offer more appropriate solutions to ethical practice with respect to the autonomy of the public health profession.

The second ethical rationale of compulsory vaccination is the need to support vulnerable people and uphold the integrity of the healthcare system. Ethical public health policy considers the greater good, particularly in circumstances where voluntary vaccination does not reach the levels of uptake required to enable effective control of the disease and where the provision of the vaccine exposes the vulnerable populations to constant danger. The WHO (2022) underlines the

fact that, should voluntary uptake persist in being insufficient, as it would threaten the health system and disadvantaged groups, the introduction of some level of mandate or requirement is, however, ethically justifiable as long as equity, exemptions, and proportionality measures are put in place. Moreover, Giubilini et al. (2023) suggest certain conditions of ethically justifiable vaccine mandates among healthcare professionals, which comprise the utility of vaccines and the unavailability of less restrictive options. This set of requirements supports the idea that requirements should be specific, evidence-based, and supported with safeguards as opposed to general coercion. Mandates, therefore, are justifiable where they foster directly individual protection and social responsibilities, including secure access to medical care and operating health systems.

Irrespective of these reasons, the issues of autonomy on the individual level are an important ethical dilemma of compulsory vaccination. Autonomy - the entitlement of people to decide what to do with their bodies is a key principle in the ethics of medicine. Opponents have accused the mandates of sabotage voluntary consent and bodily wholeness. Opponents, such as Kowalik (2022), believe that the moral obligation to vaccinate is not inherent and that overriding autonomy lacks any ethically justifiable ground, despite the benefits to the population as a whole may be large. Others argue that when access to education, jobs, or any other rights is conditional on vaccination, then mandates are coercive in ways that disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups (Bardosh et al., 2024). These objections are indicative of a perception that there should be no collateral damage to autonomy and consent on the part of public health, and that there should be equity and proportionality in mandates. Thus, to perform ethical justification, it is necessary to prove that limitations of autonomy are not only a necessity, but also a useful instrument of authorities.

The harm principle and proportionality are the key elements in evaluating the ethical validity of the policy of mandatory vaccination. When the benefits of a given policy, such as the

prevention of serious illness, the protection of vulnerable populations, and the decrease of healthcare burden, are evidently higher than the moral cost of limiting individual freedom, the policy is ethically justified. The proposal of selective mandates by Williams (2022) demonstrates that the ethics of a mandate become stronger when the two groups targeted are likely to experience significant gains and will assist in decreasing the risk to the population. Ethical standards on mandates further focus on keen consideration of whether other, less restrictive options can produce similar benefits. These requirements prevent excessive ambitions and make sure that coercion is not invoked in unreasoned situations but only in cases of solid evidence and necessity. Therefore, when autonomy is allowed where it is possible, mandatory vaccination is not an ethical default, but an ethical conditional, justifiable where it is explained by the protection of the harm, evidence of necessity, and considering autonomy.

In conclusion, it is possible to ethically justify Mandatory vaccination under certain strict ethical requirements: a high risk to the health of the population, strong evidence of the effectiveness of this vaccine, the ineffectiveness of voluntary measures, and the appropriate coercion with relevant safeguards. With these standards, policymakers in the field of problemfocused health care can ensure that individual autonomy is not violated and that the overall wellbeing of the people remains preserved. Mandates are morally justifiable, not universally mandatory.