



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on October 2, 2009

## NY Health Workers Protest Mandatory Vaccines

Healthcare workers in the state of New York are resisting and protesting government-mandated vaccinations against the seasonal and swine influenzas, drawing a great deal of media coverage.

Hundreds of protestors rallied Tuesday at the Capitol in Albany chanting “No forced shots” to demand that the rule be overturned. Hundreds more also gathered at demonstrations around the state.

The so-called “emergency regulation” approved by the State Health Department in August has attracted widespread criticism from unions, employees, and opponents all across the country. With no religious or philosophical exemptions, it purports to require all New York hospital, hospice, and home healthcare workers — more than half of a million people so far — to be inoculated, though it doesn’t explain how it should be enforced.



In response, hospitals are telling their workers to get the flu shots or get fired — an unprecedented step that is meeting increasing resistance. “We see this as an issue of workers’ rights,” explained a spokesperson for the New York State Nurses Association, which opposes the regulation. Many healthcare workers are openly refusing to take the shot, threatening to quit or move elsewhere.

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“These mandatory vaccination programs are really sucking the air out of the room to deal with infection control in a more comprehensive manner,” explained occupational health and safety director of the Service Employees International Union Bill Borwegen. “This is the worst time to be demoralizing health-care workers: when we need them to be on the front line of this epidemic.”

The Public Employees Federation has also come out against the policy, with President Kenneth Brynien releasing a statement calling for it to be reversed. “No other state mandates vaccination for influenza, nor has the federal government done so,” he said. “New York health care workers should not be used to test an unproven policy.” He also noted that some employees have already left or been fired for refusing to comply.

“Most of us just don’t feel that it’s safe,” nurse Sue Fields, one of the primary organizers of the protests, told [Fox News](#). “We all know that this is a fast-tracked medication — it contains thimerosal, it contains mercury.” She also argued that the government should not be mandating vaccines. *USA Today*, in an article entitled “[N.Y. health care workers protest mandatory H1N1 flu shots](#),” quoted her saying: “There’s no proof this vaccine will protect us from swine flu or protect us from spreading it to others.”



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Others were concerned about the lack of standard testing procedures. “This vaccine has not been clinically tested to the same degree as the regular flu vaccine,” nurse Tara Accavallo told [Newsday](#). “If something happens to me, if I get seriously injured from this vaccine, who’s going to help me?” It won’t be the vaccine makers because they have been issued blanket immunity by the government, yet one more concern among healthcare workers.

Another protesting healthcare worker was worried about the effects the vaccine could have on her unborn child. “Up until this year, the choice to forego the vaccine has been there for me,” said Cherryl Robbins. “This year, at a time when I’m pregnant with my first child, and I feel more responsibility for what I put in my body than at any other point in my life, that choice has been taken away from me.”

The state’s Health Commissioner is dismissing their concerns and criticizing the “anti-vaccine” protesters, arguing that the immunizations were safe and effective. “Questions about safety and claims of personal preference are understandable,” [wrote Commissioner Richard Daines](#). But the rest of his letter indicates that he doesn’t really feel that way. He bemoaned the normal 40 to 50 percent immunization rates under even the most “vigorous” voluntary programs and said patients are better served with forced vaccinations for health staff.

“Without mandated vaccinations, many ethically troubling situations may occur,” he said, pointing to dubious scenarios like a worker refusing the seasonal flu vaccine but then expecting “to be in the front of the line for the ‘good stuff’ - the new and strictly rationed swine flu vaccine.” He closed by prodding the subjects of the mandate to support the forced vaccinations.

Another proponent of the mandatory vaccine regime was quoted in a *New York Times* article entitled [“In Requiring Flu Vaccinations for Health Care Workers, New York Hits Resistance.”](#) “We tried to market the idea, to push people, to educate,” said Dr. Julie Gerberding, the former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “It’s time to look at a more aggressive approach.”

Protestors held a wide variety of signs with slogans like “the state doesn’t own my body,” “no flu shot, no job?” and “we’re not lab rats.” Others referenced the Fourth Amendment. A variety of groups helped organize the protests, including the local Campaign for Liberty chapters and the Autism Action Network. Activists nationwide have joined in the fray, fearing similar and even more draconian proposals could expand across the country if resistance isn’t fierce.

Some are claiming this is just a precursor to forced shots for everybody. A *Washington Post* article entitled [“Mandatory Flu Shots Hit Resistance”](#) quotes Lori Price of Citizens for Legitimate Government, an organization that favors limited government. “You start with health-care workers but then expand that umbrella to make it mandatory for everybody,” she said. “It’s all part of an encroachment on our liberties.”

George Annas, a bioethicist with Boston University told the *Post*: “As a general rule, medicine should be a voluntary occupation. Once you start requiring doctors to get it, doctors are going to think it’s reasonable to make patients get it. It starts you down that mandatory route, and I don’t think we want to go there.”

The resistance to vaccines amongst healthcare workers is hardly unique to America. In [Britain](#), for instance, over half of all general practitioners have indicated that they will turn down the shot. At least one third of nurses, too.

A private hospital has a right to establish conditions of employment, but the government has no business mandating any sort of medical procedures whatsoever. New York’s health “authorities” have



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overstepped their bounds, and hopefully they have bitten off more than they can chew. Vaccination and medical treatment must always remain voluntary for everyone in America, regardless of their occupation — the right to control one's own body is unalienable and sacred, and so it must be respected by the state.

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