

The American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) Opposes Tennessee (TN)
Legislation that Poses a Risk to Public Health

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With the Advocacy Committee of AMWA

AMWA supports strengthening mandatory vaccination laws and mask requirements and believes that lawmakers have a responsibility to ensure public health and quell the threat of serious but preventable diseases such as COVID-19.

On October 27, during a third special session, Tennessee House and Senate members passed an omnibus bill, HB9077/SB9014, that combined nearly 100 bills designed to roll back COVID mandates. The proposed legislation would undermine public health by weakening the power of qualified professionals to perform their duties.

HB9078 aims to ban businesses from requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination from customers or employees. HB9020 would block the Tennessee Board of Medical Examiners from disciplining doctors for anything "solely related to the physician's prescription, recommendation, use, or opinion relative to a treatment for COVID-19," including treatments that aren't approved by the [state's health department or the FDA](#). HB9076/SB9013, grants the governor with the exclusive power to issue executive orders and directives with respect to each county health department in the state of Tennessee. The proposed bill would strip county [health departments of all authority during a pandemic](#) and place the fate of public health in the hands of county mayors.

In only 20 months, confirmed COVID cases have risen to a record 200 million infected individuals and over [four million deaths](#). While the numbers have been trending down in recent months, the appearance of the Delta variant has led to a disastrous resurgence in global coronavirus cases. Alarmingly, the Delta variant is infecting and hospitalizing the younger population in greater numbers than before. While many children are not old enough to get the vaccine, this points to the importance of herd immunity to keep children safe; if a greater number of adults were vaccinated, the Delta variant would not be able to spread at this scale and would not reach many populations. Unfortunately, scientists predict that the Delta variant and the resurging deaths are not a temporary blip.

Findings from a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) suggest that statewide mask mandates are associated with statistically significant declines in weekly COVID-19 hospitalization growth rates for adults aged 18–64 years. Further, previous studies have shown that the various physical distancing measures, including mask mandates, are associated with immediate declines in COVID-19 case growth rates.

According to the CDC, many experts rank vaccines among the greatest public health achievements that science has ever produced. The overwhelming scientific consensus is that vaccine risks are small and their benefits are large. Due in large part to the ingenuity and innovation of some of the most eminent scientists in the world, the United States can offer several [CDC](#) and [FDA](#) approved vaccines to help combat the spread of COVID.

One of the reasons legislatures pass mandates and courts uphold them is that abundant evidence supports the claim that such mandates prevent diseases, and, in doing so, protect children and the community. These mandates fit with our basic principles of state police power, reasonable limits on individual rights, and protecting children. They are also supported by over a hundred years of court precedent.

Since 1915, AMWA has supported common sense precautions for infectious diseases. This includes mask and vaccine requirements. To stem the spread of coronavirus, it is imperative that qualified professionals in county health departments and not local mayors, perform their essential function during a global pandemic. Finally, physicians spreading dangerous misinformation should be held accountable. The safety and efficacy of masks and vaccines have been proven. AMWA supports measures that keep women in the healthcare community and the community at large, safe during the ongoing health crisis.

Katrina Green, MD Emergency Medicine physician with colleagues at the TN state house supporting public health and science backed COVID education. 10/2021

