



F12 Mandatory Vaccination: The Italian Case Between Clinical and Legal Profiles

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of improving knowledge regarding mandatory vaccinations.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the importance of the subject of vaccinations. This subject is widely considered one of the greatest medical achievements of modern civilization. Childhood diseases that were commonplace less than a generation ago are now increasingly rare because of vaccines.

To be effective at eliminating communicable diseases, vaccines must be administered to a sufficient number of people in the community. Thus, public health officials have mandated vaccination for certain diseases as a condition of school attendance.

The Italian government has declared ten vaccines mandatory for children up to age 16 attending school in an effort to combat what it characterizes as misinformation about vaccines. The new measures followed an intense public debate regarding vaccines after a measles outbreak. The government approved making ten vaccines, including measles, rubella, and chickenpox, mandatory beginning September 2017 for children attending Italian pre-schools through the second year of high school. Other required vaccines include tetanus, diphtheria, polio, and hepatitis B. The health minister said children will not be accepted into nursery or pre-schools without proof of vaccinations, while parents of children legally obliged to attend school will face hefty fines for non-compliance. The certification will be required every year.

Because of the success and the mandatory nature of vaccinations, most people would probably not consider vaccination an optional method of medical treatment. For most parents, the “decision” to vaccinate is equivalent to the “decision” to feed one’s child. Typically, a doctor informs parents of the school vaccination schedule and the parents’ consent to having their child vaccinated; however, for some parents, vaccination is no routine matter. From the time the smallpox vaccine was introduced, vaccination has had its critics. In the two centuries since then, many different types of objections have been raised, with some questioning the scientific qualifications of mass immunization. Others have focused on the personal liberty interests at stake and have objected to the paternalistic nature of government imposition of what is viewed as a personal medical choice. Still others have opposed vaccination for personal or religious reasons.

The overwhelming effectiveness of vaccination programs may lead individuals to ignore the benefits of vaccination and focus more on the risk of side effects. Moreover, some have criticized the coercive nature of these programs. These objections may lead to an unacceptably high number of exemptions, which can compromise vaccination programs and leave the population susceptible to outbreaks.

This presentation explores vaccination programs with an eye toward greater public safety without ignoring the reality of a small but committed group of vaccine critics. This presentation concludes by recommending stricter enforcement of mandatory requirements for most vaccines and greater dissemination of information on the continued importance of vaccinations.

Mandatory Vaccination, Mass Immunization, Health of Children