



Vaccine Mandates, Military Readiness, and National Security

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Removal of Vaccine Mandates in the Military Negatively Impacts National Security

Vaccination policy is a matter of troop readiness and national security—not only personal health.

- On April 21, 2026, the Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth announced that flu vaccines will no longer be necessary for our armed forces.
<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/hegseth-scraps-mandatory-flu-shots-for-troops/ar-AA21oYCD>
- Public advocacy for vaccines is difficult in an environment of misinformation.
- Ending mandatory flu vaccination for armed forces members is bad policy.
- As stated by author Jack McCallum, American military leaders need to be reminded that “[disease and pathogens are as great a threat as any human adversary.](https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/MR-Book-Reviews/Book-Review-Archives/2025/Epidemics/)”
<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/MR-Book-Reviews/Book-Review-Archives/2025/Epidemics/>



The 1918 warning

Influenza devastated military forces and helped demonstrate why disease control matters to readiness.

- We should remember the lessons taught by the 1918 flu-like cases in World War I, which evidence indicates started at Fort Riley, Kansas. https://archive.cdc.gov/www_cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/pandemic-timeline-1918.htm
- The devastating second wave of the 1918 flu began at Camp Devens, Massachusetts, with over 14,000 flu cases.
- In World War I U.S. soldier deaths from flu were as nearly matching combat deaths. <https://www.military.com/history/this-world-war-i-killer-took-almost-as-many-us-troops-lives-as-combat.html>

45,000

U.S. soldiers died of flu in World War I, as stated in the document

53,402

U.S. combat deaths in World War I, as stated in the document



Disease spreads where forces gather

Cramped quarters, poor sanitation, and frontline conditions make infectious disease a force multiplier.

- Disease and pestilence have ravaged soldiers throughout history, sometimes defeating armies.
<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/MR-Book-Reviews/Book-Review-Archives/2025/Epidemics/>
- Public health should be prioritized—not minimized—in the armed forces.
- Even an imperfect flu vaccine can mitigate outbreaks and reduce illness severity.



Vaccination has deep military roots

Military vaccination strategy can be traced back to the Revolutionary War.

- George Washington mandated smallpox inoculation for troops. <https://www.history.com/articles/smallpox-george-washington-revolutionary-war>
- Smallpox is highly infectious with an almost 30% fatality rate. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK221063/>
- Variolation carried risk but was far safer than contracting smallpox. https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/smallpox/sp_variolation.html

~30%

Smallpox fatality rate cited in the document

1–2%

Approximate variolation fatality rate cited in the document



Misinformation distorts risk

The antivaccine movement overstates harms while under-emphasizing safety data.

- Vaccines for hepatitis, measles, polio, COVID-19, and scheduled immunizations and have strong safety profiles.
- There are significant harms from vaccination, but these are rare.
- But disease risks are much greater than the rare risks from vaccination.

References:

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/contributors/2025/10/22/cdc-hepatitis-b-hbv-vaccine-kentucky-healthcare/86670970007/>

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/contributors/2025/05/08/trump-doge-cuts-measles-outbreak-misinformation-health/83327636007/>

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/contributors/2025/07/10/vaccine-polio-outbreak-amish-cdc-rfk-jr-autism/84505650007/>

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/contributors/2025/12/31/fda-covid-vaccine-cdc-trump-kentucky-kids/87945421007/>

<https://www.infectioncontroltoday.com/view/physician-s-warning-ending-federal-childhood-vaccine-reporting-puts-children-communities-risk>



Publication and censorship concerns

The document describes delayed publication of research on COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness.

- A Washington Post article cited a CDC vaccination safety study not being published.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2026/04/22/covid-vaccine-report-blocked-cdc-mmwr/>
- The blocked study reportedly found COVID-19 vaccination cut hospitalization and ER visit rates in healthy adults by almost half.
- The article says methodology concerns were cited, but describes the methodology as time-tested and used for decades.



The current burden is not theoretical

Flu, long flu, and long COVID are linked to workforce and military readiness concerns.

- For example, there were 185 influenza deaths in Kentucky during the 2025–2026 flu season. With 34 of those deaths were among people aged 19 to 64.
<https://dashboard.chfs.ky.gov/views/DPHRSP001RespiratoryDiseases/Deaths?>
- A Lancet study reported long COVID symptoms in a quarter of Marine recruits who had predominantly mild or asymptomatic COVID.

185

Kentucky flu deaths cited for the 2025–2026 season

1/4

Marine recruits with long COVID in the cited Lancet study



Influenza Outbreak Among Military Recruits Following Vaccine Policy Change

Confirmed outbreak at Lackland Air Force Base (Joint Base San Antonio), Texas — as of 18 June 2026.

BeaconBio outbreak report: <https://beaconbio.org/en/report/?reportid=5d15d54c-73c2-4c5b-88b5-63a2b22523e1&eventid=f80ab9b8-815b-4537-8fdd-c0a574117433>

- A confirmed influenza outbreak has been reported at Lackland Air Force Base (Joint Base San Antonio), Texas.
- In April 2026, annual influenza vaccination became optional for active-duty and reserve military personnel.
- Rapid transmission in basic training is straining military healthcare resources; the outbreak and severe outcomes remain under investigation.

222

Confirmed cases
as of 18 June 2026

40%

Recruit
vaccination rate,
down from ~100%

2

Hospitalizations;
1 death under
investigation



Military Reinstates Flu Shot Requirement as Cases Increase

Cases climbed to 275 by June 24, 2026, and military services restored the flu vaccination requirement. ABC News: <https://abcnews.com/Health/military-services-requiring-recruits-flu-shots-air-force/story?id=134126794>

Key Points

- By 24 June 2026, cumulative outbreak cases rose to 275, up from 222 a few days previously.
- The outbreak began about two months after the Department of War ended the annual influenza vaccine requirement.
- In response, military services have begun requiring recruits to receive influenza vaccinations again.

Assessment

- The outbreak highlights the potential impact of decreased vaccination coverage in high-density military training settings.
- Reinstating vaccination requirements reflects concern over operational readiness and force health protection.

1945

The prior military flu shot requirement had been in place since 1945.

How events unfolded



Public health infrastructure is part of national security

Reduced preparedness funding weakens national security.

- National security is at risk when public health agencies and vaccine strategies are dismantled.
- The NIH has eliminated “biodefense/pandemic preparedness” as a key strategic focus.
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-025-04160-1>
- The University of Kentucky is cited as risking up to \$40 million in NIH funding losses. <https://www.lpm.org/news/2025-02-11/university-of-kentucky-expects-to-lose-40m-in-next-year-from-trumps-nih-cuts>

\$40M

Potential University of Kentucky NIH funding loss cited in the document



Key takeaways

Vaccination has long been used to preserve fighting strength.

Influenza and COVID-19 can undermine military readiness through outbreaks and long-term sequelae.

Policy, public trust, research publications, and funding all shape national preparedness.