

# Opinion: Texas legislators should protect public health, not limit vaccine mandates

*John T. Dugan III and Lindy McGee*

The Legislature convened last week for its third special session with instructions to pass legislation regarding whether any state or local government entities in Texas can mandate that an individual receive a COVID-19 vaccine, and if so, what exemptions would apply to such a mandate.

The Immunization Partnership is concerned that a broad interpretation of the governor's proclamation could put at risk Texas lives, businesses and families at a time when unvaccinated individuals account for over [90 percent of COVID hospitalizations](#) and an even greater percentage of those who die.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, some Texas politicians have made public health experts — not the virus — the common political enemy. A [Kaiser Health News analysis](#) this month found legislators in Texas and 25 other states are moving with great force to weaken the abilities of public health experts to protect the public's health.

**OUR BEST OFFER: 26 Weeks for 99¢!** Get Digital Access Today

**SALE! 26 Weeks for 99¢**

We oppose several bills introduced in the current special session because they fail to protect Texans and further erode the vital role of our state's public health and medical experts in combating this pandemic.

Bills in the Senate, such as [Senate Bill 11](#), would prohibit a government entity from requiring proof of a COVID-19 vaccination for access; prevent employers from requiring proof of immunization; and expand non-medical vaccination exemptions.

Several House bills have similar language, such as [House Bill 39](#). Others would make it a misdemeanor crime and a licensure suspension for a company or hospital to require a COVID immunization; prohibit or restrict private and public health plans, schools, government agencies and private universities from requiring a vaccination; and prohibit students with a non-medical vaccine exemption from being excluded from school during a declared emergency or pandemic.

All of the above measures would result in lower overall vaccination rates and make Texas a less safe place to live. They would also cause economic and academic turmoil as Texans are forced to undergo surge after surge of COVID-19 cases. Political considerations, not public health interests, drive these harmful bills.

Dr. Peter Hotez, a member of The Immunization Partnership Scientific Advisory Council, and Rekha Lakshmanan, our director of advocacy and public policy, are among the authors of an article published this month in [The Lancet](#) which called for uncoupling vaccination from politics. They correctly point out that Texas Republican and Democratic lawmakers have frequently worked together in the past to pass vaccine legislation to protect and improve our state's public health.

We expect our elected officials to represent the best interests of their constituents, and not just the

vocal few who push agendas harmful to Texans. We encourage you to contact your state representative and senator to tell them to oppose these dangerous bills. The power of the people comes from the voice of the people. It is time Texas lawmakers hear our voices.

*Dugan, M.D., is the incoming chair, and McGee, M.D., is an incoming member of the executive committee of The Immunization Partnership, a statewide nonprofit organization that aims to create a community free from vaccine-preventable diseases by educating the community, advocating for evidence-based public policy and supporting immunization best practices.*