

# DECIPHERING THE CODE: Navigating the Tricky Waters of Vaccine Policy and Anti-Vaccine Choice Messaging



*Certain phrases in the immunization policy discussion may mean different things to you as a legislator compared to an anti-vaccine group. Learn about the **"code words"** before diving into conversations and legislation regarding vaccines.*

## CODE:

**"Mandatory vaccines"**

**"Forcing parents to  
vaccinate their kids"**

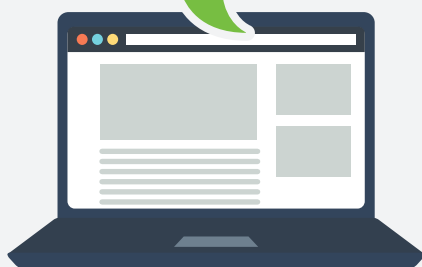


## TRANSLATION:

- ▶ This code relies on a strawman argument.
- ▶ No one in the policy space is forcing parents to vaccinate their children. Parents do not have to vaccinate – period.
- ▶ Discussions in the policy arena focus on vaccine guidelines for school entry.
- ▶ All 50 states have a policy requiring parents to show documentation of vaccination against communicable diseases if they want to send their kid to school or child care with others.
- ▶ Each state also has rules allowing parents to exempt their child if they are not medically able to be vaccinated.
- ▶ Maintaining strong herd immunity is critical, largely because of those medically vulnerable, unvaccinated children.

## CODE:

**"Vaccine choice"  
or "health choice"**



## TRANSLATION:

- ▶ This term is used to frame the policy conversation as a matter of "choice" rather than having arguments about the science of vaccines.
- ▶ Anti-vaccine groups often don't explicitly *oppose* vaccination, but instead frame the issue as a matter of individual choice, freedom or personal liberties.
- ▶ No one is forcing anyone to vaccinate, so it already is a matter of individual choice.
- ▶ However, when it comes to talking about children attending community schooling or child care, it's important to focus on "freedom from" preventable deadly diseases – not just "freedom to" skip vaccines.

## CODE:

**"Parents' rights"**



## TRANSLATION:

- ▶ While no one is advocating for a policy that would literally force parents to immunize their children, current laws do not recognize parental rights to the point of child endangerment in the case of a medical crisis.
- ▶ They also do not recognize one parent's right to create a risk to other people's children and an entire community.
- ▶ The vaccine conversation is different than other conversations about a parent's right to make medical decisions for their child. Immunization decisions can impact the safety of entire communities.

## CODE:

**"Medical freedom"**



## TRANSLATION:

- ▶ To an anti-vaccine activist, "medical freedom" ties together all of the codes.
- ▶ Anti-vaccine supporters believe there should be no immunization requirements whatsoever, but there's a reason all 50 states have vaccination guidelines for school and child care entry – the public health benefits of vaccines far outweigh any risks.
- ▶ Children should have the right to attend school or child care in a safe environment.
- ▶ It is reasonable to establish parameters to protect the community's health.