

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Trump Cuts Federal Funding to Schools with Covid-19 Vaccine Mandates; USVI Unaffected

President Trump's executive order directs federal agencies to block funding to schools with COVID-19 vaccine mandates. With no active mandates in USVI schools or the University of the Virgin Islands, the territory is unlikely to face funding cuts.

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President Donald Trump signed an executive order today that prohibits federal funding for schools and universities requiring students to receive the COVID-19 vaccine for in-person attendance.

Mr. Trump has been a vocal critic of Covid-19 vaccine mandates, a position he reiterated during the announcement of the executive order. While specific comments from today's signing were not detailed, Trump's previous statements provide context for his stance. During his campaign, he declared, "I will not give one penny to any school that has a vaccine mandate," a promise echoed in posts on X today celebrating the order as a fulfillment of his commitment to protect children from what he has called a "phony vaccine." The executive order aligns with his broader efforts to roll back vaccine requirements, including reinstating military personnel discharged for refusing the vaccine.

The debate over Covid-19 vaccine mandates emerged following the virus's arrival in the U.S. in early 2020, which led to over 1 million deaths and significant societal disruptions. Vaccines, developed rapidly under Trump's Operation Warp Speed in late 2020, were initially hailed as a critical tool to combat the pandemic. However, mandates imposed by federal, state, and local entities faced opposition, particularly from Republicans, leading to legal and political battles. By 2025, 21 states had banned coronavirus vaccine mandates in schools, reflecting a patchwork of policies across the country. The Biden administration had maintained certain vaccine requirements, which Trump has now targeted with this executive order.

The executive order specifically bars federal funds from supporting educational institutions—ranging from elementary schools to universities—that mandate Covid-19 vaccinations for in-person education. It directs the Department of Health and Human Services, led by newly confirmed Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and the Department of Education to establish compliance guidelines and develop a plan to end what the order describes as "coercive Covid-19 vaccine mandates." The order also requires a report on non-compliant entities and a system to prevent federal funding from reaching schools with such mandates. This move is part of Trump's broader agenda to reduce federal spending, including through initiatives like the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which aims to cut up to \$1 trillion annually.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, the executive order's direct impact may be limited due to existing local policies. According to V.I. Department of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, there is currently no Covid-19 vaccine mandate in USVI schools. Similarly, the University of the Virgin Islands has ended its Covid-19 vaccine mandate, aligning with a trend of relaxing such requirements. As a result, schools and universities in the territory are unlikely to face immediate funding cuts under this order.

Nationally, the executive order has reignited debates over vaccine mandates, public health, and federal authority. Critics argue that it undermines efforts to protect public health, especially in educational settings, while supporters see it as a defense of individual freedoms. The order also reflects Trump's ongoing efforts to reshape federal policy, including reversing Biden-era initiatives on vaccine requirements and diversity programs. Legal challenges are anticipated, as some states and educational institutions may contest the order's constitutionality or its impact on federal funding streams.