Germany Will Fine Parents Who Refuse to Vaccinate Their Children

By Alex Berezow, PhD — November 21, 2019

Germans don't have a lot of patience for nonsense, often to a fault.

A few years back, my wife and I landed at the international airport in Frankfurt for a layover on our way to Poland. There was almost nobody in line at passport control, so while we waited to be served, we were casually chatting with the person behind us.

When it was our turn, we approached the desk. The agent looked at me and said, "Hurry. You're holding up the line." I turned back and gazed upon a largely empty room and thought to myself, "Oh, this is German humor." So I chuckled.

He glared at me. "This isn't funny."

Okay, then.

While Germans' no-nonsense approach to life can be irritating, it also has some very notable benefits. The trains run on time. (Well, they used to, anyway.) Their export products, particularly cars, are nice and well-built. They have zero tolerance for Holocaust denial, which is actually a crime in their country. (They gave an 89-year-old woman a 14-month prison sentence for it.)

And now, Germany will fine parents who refuse to vaccinate their children against measles. According to the New York Times, the fine could be as high as €2,500.

Just like Americans, Germans are concerned about infringing on individual rights. In anticipation of this, the article quoted Germany's health minister Jens Spahn, who said, "My understanding of freedom does not stop at my level as an individual... It is also a question of whether I am
unnecessarily putting others at risk."

His understanding of freedom is correct, and it is the same argument that my colleague Dr. Josh Bloom and I made in Newsweek [5] and Dr. Ethan Siegel and I made in Scientific American [6]. The First Amendment does not mean, "I can do whatever I want regardless of the consequences," though too many Americans seem to have precisely that understanding.

**Will the United States Follow Germany’s Lead?**

It seems that the U.S. is slowly going in Germany’s direction. California just passed an incredibly strict vaccination law that targets doctors suspected of handing out exemptions like candy [7]. This year, New York City fined three people $1,000 [8] each for refusing a measles vaccine. In 2017, a Michigan woman went to jail for five days [9] for refusing to vaccinate her son.

Nobody wants this outcome. But a person who refuses vaccines is a clear and present danger to public health and safety. We should expect more crackdowns until anti-vaxxers wise up.