A recent judge ruling protects the public health of its local community by prohibiting unvaccinated students from attending school when another classmate has a vaccine-preventable disease. Three families claimed that their right to practice their religious beliefs was infringed when their children were kept from school because of New York City's immunization requirements. Brooklyn's Federal District Court Judge William F. Kuntz referenced a 1905 Supreme Court ruling when he ruled against all three families. Judge Kuntz writes in his ruling, [The Supreme Court] has strongly suggested that religious objectors are not constitutionally exempt from vaccinations. Patricia Finn, the litigant's lawyer, intends to appeal the decision refuting, There's no way that court anticipated that children would be subjected [to mandatory vaccinations].

While those families may contest the ruling, we at ACSH wholeheartedly agree with the public health position this decision represents. The parents' claims appear a bit foolish and most certainly hold no scientific basis. Dina Check, a mother who rejected vaccination for her daughter, believes immunizations brought on allergies that her daughter otherwise would not have. She comments additionally, Disease is pestilence and pestilence is from the devil. The devil is germs and disease, which is cancer and any of those things that can take you down. She went on to express her absolute trust in God to handle infectious diseases in her own family.

The problem, as agreed to by the judge, is that Ms. Check's rationale as applied to her child would leave her classmates as defenseless as her unvaccinated child. Public health experts explain that high immunization rates maintain a community's herd immunity. Higher levels of such herd immunity help to curb against disease outbreaks by effectively limiting the number of people that are affected by a certain disease, thereby preventing the disease from sustaining itself.

This year there have been numerous examples of dents in herd immunity. For example, Ohio, which has granted more and more religious and philosophical exemptions, is fighting to control the measles outbreak that recently spread to a largely unvaccinated Amish community. And California, another state which still has the unscientific and antithetical to public health philosophical exemptions, is suffering from a variety of epidemics of previously-conquered childhood contagions.
Daniel Salmon, the deputy director at the Institute for Vaccine Safety at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, expounds, "parents who refuse vaccination tend to cluster geographically, it takes only a few unvaccinated children to start an outbreak. Diseases have a way of finding our vulnerabilities; the kinks in our armor."