Florida officials deleted data, stats from dubious COVID analysis: report

Enlarge / Florida surgeon general Joseph Ladapo speaks at a press conference.

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Florida health officials deleted key data and statistics from a state analysis on the safety of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, falsely making them appear unsafe for young men, according to draft versions of the analysis obtained by the Tampa Bay Times through public records requests.

The final analysis, which was widely criticized for its poor quality and dubious conclusions, was the basis for a statewide recommendation by Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo last October that young men, ages 18 to 39, should *not* receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. The analysis—posted on the Florida Department of Health's website with no authors listed—claimed to find "an 84% increase in the relative incidence of cardiac-related death among males 18-39 years old within 28 days following mRNA vaccination."

Ladapo, who has a history of fearmongering about COVID-19 vaccines, touted the analysis, saying in a press release at the time that "these are important findings that should be communicated to Floridians."

But according to draft versions of the analysis, the state epidemiologists who worked on the report came to entirely different conclusions.

The draft version contained data that showed that getting COVID-19 posed a far greater risk of cardiac-related deaths than that from mRNA vaccines. Specifically, the incidence of cardiac-related deaths from infection was more than 10 times higher than from the vaccine in people ages 18 to 24 and more than five times higher for people 25 to 39. This data is in line with many peer-reviewed, published studies but was omitted entirely from the final analysis announced by Ladapo.

Also omitted was a sensitivity analysis that showed that the risk of cardiac-related deaths in young men was not significant. The final version drew flak for not including a sensitivity analysis, with the core conclusion of risk in young men hinging on just 20 deaths. A sensitivity analysis is a means to essentially evaluate the robustness of a finding, and it was present in three versions of the draft analysis but not in the final one.

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“It’s a double-check that didn’t confirm that finding,” said Jonathan Laxton, a physician and assistant professor of medicine at the University of Manitoba, who reviewed the drafts for the Tampa Bay Times.

Overall, the draft versions of the analysis written by state epidemiologists *supported* the use of mRNA. “The risk associated with COVID-19 infection clearly outweighs any potential risks associated with mRNA vaccination,” one version states.

Matt Hitchings, an infectious disease epidemiologist and professor of biostatistics at the University of Florida, who also reviewed the drafts for the Times, told the outlet that the excluded data was akin to academic dishonesty. “You can

call it a lie by omission," he said.

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