

Italy health czar blames resignation on 'anti-science' government

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The president of Italy's national health research organisation on Wednesday said he had been driven to resign due the "anti-scientific" policies of the country's populist government including efforts to undermine confidence in vital vaccinations.

Professor Walter Ricciardi of the National Health Institute (ISS) said an aversion to evidence-based policy among the coalition of Italy's far-right League and anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) put public health at risk.

"Representatives of the government have endorsed unscientific or frankly anti-scientific positions on many issues," he said in an interview with the *Corriere della Sera* daily.

"It's clear that when the deputy [prime minister](#) says that he, as a father, believes there are too many obligatory, useless and dangerous vaccines, that's not just unscientific, it's anti-scientific," he said in reference to League head Matteo Salvini.

In 2017 Italy's centre-left government made it compulsory for children in pre-school education to be vaccinated against 10 diseases, including measles, tetanus and polio.

The Five Star Movement, then in opposition, led a charge against the law, saying it amounted to a gift to [pharmaceutical companies](#), while the League played on discredited claims that vaccinations can cause autism.

The parties came power last year by forming a [coalition government](#).

In the interview Ricciardi listed a wide array of areas in which he accused government policy-makers of ignoring the facts.

"Saying repeatedly that migrants carry diseases is groundless and... forces (the institute) to self-censure in order not to contradict the political line," he said.

Ricciardi said the government's insistence that waste-to-energy plants were obsolete was "nonsensical", and a law that eases restrictions on the use of contaminated soils in farming was "a decision taken without evaluating the impact on health".

"And yet these are issues that are decisive for public health," he said.

"All this reminds me of Donald Trump's recommendation to the US National Health Institute to no longer use the term 'evidence-based'.

"It's an approach taken by populists, who have great difficulty in interacting with science," Ricciardi added.

The 2017 vaccination push was adopted in order to fight back against a drop in the number of people being vaccinated that had taken coverage below the 95 percent limit recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

In December the coalition shocked the Italian scientific community by sacking the entire board of the committee of technical and scientific experts who advise the government on health policy.

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