



# **HHS' Assault on Autistic People and Public Health:**

## **Year One**

# HHS' Assault on Autistic People and Public Health: Year One

## Introduction

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Over the last 12 months, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS or the Department) has made unprecedented changes to its priorities and operations, thereby reshaping the public health landscape. Both media coverage and public awareness of the administration's actions have varied widely, limiting any one person's ability to monitor these actions. In addition to these changes, the prevalence of misinformation promoted by the administration has created a crisis in public health. No topics better exemplify this phenomenon than vaccines and autism.

In contrast to prior administrations, HHS leadership has had an outsized focus on autism and vaccine policy in the past year, in large part due to key HHS figures' belief in a causal link between the two. Nearly three decades of research support that vaccines do not cause autism.<sup>1</sup> Vaccines remain a safe and effective tool to combat infectious disease. This administration continues to challenge this scientific consensus, instead favoring the preexisting biases of HHS leadership. Changes in priorities to autism research and programs that serve autistic people further contribute to confusion.

The report addresses gaps in media coverage and public awareness of HHS actions on vaccines and autism in the first year of the Department under President Donald Trump and Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (RFK Jr.). The timeline in the report can serve as a central resource for policymakers, individuals with disabilities and their families,<sup>2</sup> and the general public to learn more about key administration actions related to autism.

The background of this report presents an overview of RFK Jr.'s personal history and his beliefs; the history of Make American Healthy Again (MAHA) and related factions and actors; and elements of the U.S. public health apparatus invoked by the administration's actions in order to fully contextualize the past year's events. This is followed by a timeline of events spanning January 20, 2025 to January 20, 2026, the first year of President Trump's administration. These events relate to HHS' policy decisions about autism, vaccines, and systematic departmental operations under Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and the broader Trump administration.

Subsequent analysis examines patterns in the actions taken by the administration and how they relate to pre-existing beliefs held by the secretary as well as the impact of these actions on public opinion and trust in the administration. The report concludes with federal and state policy recommendations and guidance for advocates. These recommendations prioritize dignity and respect for the autistic community, and scientific integrity, both essential frameworks that, when paired, can combat misinformation and the negative impacts of HHS' actions

This report is a joint product from the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD).

ASAN is a national grassroots disability rights organization for and by the autistic community. They work to ensure autistic people are included in policymaking, so that laws and policies meet the community's needs. ASAN's members and supporters include autistic adults and youth, cross-disability advocates, and non-autistic family members, professionals, educators, and friends.

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) is a convener, connector, and catalyst for change, increasing the political and economic power of people with disabilities. As a national cross-disability rights organization, AAPD advocates for full civil rights for the over 70 million Americans with disabilities by promoting equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Vaccine safety: Examine the evidence.* (n.d.). HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/vaccine-studies-examine-the-evidence.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> This report uses both person-first and identity-first language throughout. This choice honors the varied preferences, cultures, and identities within the disability community.

## Background

In order to better understand the past year's events, it is helpful to review key events in recent decades that have defined the beliefs currently animating HHS. This includes an overview of Sec. Kennedy's career and his stated beliefs and how that relates to his policy priorities as the Secretary of HHS. Many of his beliefs originate with notable and pervasive public health misinformation from the last few decades, including organized efforts to push back on vaccine guidance and theories about autism and its origins. This history is foundational to the MAHA movement and has influenced public perceptions of health, wellness, and disability and diluted trust in public health professionals. We also define U.S. public health apparatuses and programs that will be relevant in the timeline featured later in this report.

### Before HHS: Robert F. Kennedy's Career

Before he became Secretary Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (RFK Jr.) had an extensive career and was a well-known figure in several political and advocacy spaces. In the disability community, he already earned a reputation for making false and controversial comments about people with disabilities based on challenged, and later debunked, theories that impact immunocompromised and autistic people.

For the majority of his career, RFK Jr. worked as an environmental attorney from the mid-1980s through the 1990s, and continued to consult on cases through the late 2010s. He focused on stopping contamination and pollution through litigation, working for and co-founding several organizations and a legal clinic at Pace University.<sup>3,4,5</sup> He was able to build his public profile through his case work and political engagement.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently, he co-founded the Food Allergy Initiative (FAI). During Kennedy's tenure with the organization, FAI focused on funding research to cure food allergies. Intertwined with this mission was Kennedy's personal belief that some allergies were linked to aluminum in childhood vaccines,<sup>7,8</sup> which has since been debunked.<sup>9</sup> In the early 2000s, parent advocates approached RFK Jr. because they believed an environmental exposure, namely alleged mercury in vaccines, caused their children's autism.<sup>10</sup>

RFK Jr. frequently used his political connections to advocate for policy changes based on his vaccine-related convictions directly to legislators.<sup>11</sup> These beliefs increasingly dominated his other professional pursuits, culminating in 2018 when he helped launch the Children's Health Defense (CHD). The press release for the organization's launching cites autism and ADHD prevalence rates and the percentage of students receiving special education services as causes of concern, implying that there is an external cause "debilitating America's children."<sup>12</sup> RFK Jr.'s opposition to vaccinations and vaccine science intensified during his tenure at CHD. He eventually stepped down from his role in 2023 to run for

<sup>3</sup> Perlez, J., & Dunlap, D.W. (1984, June 4). NEW YORK DAY BY DAY; A Quiet Victory For Robert F. Kennedy Jr. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/06/04/nyregion/new-york-day-by-day-a-quiet-victory-for-robert-f-kennedy-jr.html>

<sup>4</sup> Cronin, J., & Kennedy, R. F. (1997). *The Riverkeepers: Two activists fight to reclaim our environment as a basic human right*. Simon & Schuster. <https://archive.org/details/riverkeeperstwo0000cronin>

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Haub School of Law. (n.d.). *Pace Environmental Litigation Clinic*. Pace University. Archived from the original on October 13, 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20171013103626/http://www.law.pace.edu/pace-environmental-litigation-clinic>

<sup>6</sup> Little, A. (2004, July 14). An interview with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., environmental advocate and Bush basher. *Grist*. <https://grist.org/article/griscom-kennedy/>

<sup>7</sup> Butler, K. (2025, October 29). Food allergy rates are falling. that's a problem for RFK Jr.'s aluminum vaccine theory. *Mother Jones*. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2025/10/food-allergy-rates-are-falling-thats-a-problem-for-rfk-jr-s-aluminum-vaccine-theory/>

<sup>8</sup> Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Reviewed by MD Offit, P.A. (2025, August 26). *Vaccine Ingredients: Aluminum*. CHOP Vaccine Education Center. <https://www.chop.edu/vaccine-education-center/vaccine-safety/vaccine-ingredients/aluminum>

<sup>9</sup> Branswell, H. (2025, July 14). Study finds no evidence aluminum salts in vaccines are tied to higher risk of asthma, other childhood diseases. *STAT*. <https://www.statnews.com/2025/07/14/aluminum-in-vaccines-large-danish-study-finds-no-link-to-autism-asthma-allergies/>

<sup>10</sup> Gay Stolberg, S., & Jewett, C. (2025, December 4). Kennedy's Methodical 2-Decade Quest to Dismantle Vaccine Policy. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/04/us/politics/rfk-vaccines-hhs-trump.html>

A version of this article appears in print on Dec. 6, 2025, Section A, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Methodical Quest to Sideline Scientists and Lift Allies.

<sup>11</sup> Kloor, K. (2014, July 18). Robert Kennedy Jr.'s belief in autism-vaccine connection, and its political peril. *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/robert-kennedy-jrs-belief-in-autism-vaccine-connection-and-its-political-peril/2014/07/16/f21c01ee-f70b-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/robert-kennedy-jrs-belief-in-autism-vaccine-connection-and-its-political-peril/2014/07/16/f21c01ee-f70b-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1_story.html)

<sup>12</sup> Children's Health Defense, Bono, L. (2018, September 12). *Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Announces The Launch of Children's Health Defense* [Press release]. <https://childrenshealthdefense.org/press-release/robert-f-kennedy-jr-announces-the-launch-of-childrens-health-defense/>

President in the 2024 election.<sup>13</sup> RFK Jr. would later drop out of the race and endorse the Republican nominee, Donald J. Trump, after negotiating areas of alignment.<sup>14,15</sup> President-elect Trump announced RFK Jr. as his pick for Secretary of Health and Human Services on November 14, 2024.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, RFK Jr.'s blatantly false and dangerous claims have expanded in frequency and scope. He blamed school shootings on antidepressants;<sup>17</sup> suggested AIDS may not be caused by HIV;<sup>18</sup> purported that chemicals in the water could "turn children transgender;"<sup>19</sup> said COVID-19 was engineered to spare Chinese people and Ashkenazi Jews;<sup>20</sup> and attributed the polio vaccine to higher rates of cancer among his generation.<sup>21</sup> Most notoriously, RFK Jr. claims that childhood vaccines are not safety tested,<sup>22</sup> that "there's no vaccine that is safe and effective,"<sup>23</sup> and that vaccines cause autism.<sup>24</sup>

## History of Public Health Misinformation and the Make America Healthy Again Movement

"Make America Healthy Again" is an unsubtle co-opting of "Make America Great Again," intended to demonstrate alignment between Secretary Kennedy and President Trump, but the ideas behind the Make America Healthy Again or "MAHA" Agenda are not new. MAHA is largely a coalition of lawyers, naturalists and environmentalists, parents, and (often former) health professionals sharing fringe beliefs about health and nutrition. Much like RFK Jr., many early MAHA followers focused on toxic exposures and food allergies. The idea that environmental exposures are the primary driver of "chronic disease," remains a core tenet of MAHA, but one issue in particular is where the key players behind MAHA first gained prominence<sup>25</sup>: anti-vaccine advocacy.

## Vaccines, Mercury, and Autism

For nearly 30 years, there has been a widely circulated and much-discussed alleged connection between vaccines and autism. The debate has morphed over the years, but the most pernicious talking point falsely connects autism and thimerosal, a mercury-containing compound that keeps vaccines safe from contamination.

In 1998, researcher Andrew Wakefield produced a study with only twelve participants claiming to prove that the Measles,

<sup>13</sup> Cueto, I. (2024, December 3). RFK Jr. was paid six figures by his vaccine-challenging group before presidential run. *STAT*. <https://www.statnews.com/2024/12/03/rfk-jr-maha-pay-vaccine-group-childrens-health-defense/>

<sup>14</sup> Sheerin, J. (2024, July 17). RFK apologises over leaked call of Trump making an offer. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c134p2k24nzo>

<sup>15</sup> Fowler, S. (2024, August 23). Robert F. Kennedy suspends his independent presidential campaign and backs Trump. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2024/08/23/nx-s1-5086838/robert-kennedy-future-plans-trump>

<sup>16</sup> UC Santa Barbara. (2024, November 14). *Statement by President-elect Donald J. Trump Announcing the Nomination of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS)*. The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-president-elect-donald-j-trump-announcing-the-nomination-robert-f-kennedy-jr>

<sup>17</sup> Cook, J. (2023, June 5). Robert F. Kennedy Jr. compares Elon Musk to patriots who died fighting in the American Revolution, blames anti-depressants for mass shootings. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/robert-kennedy-jr-elon-musk-american-revolution-twitter-spaces-conversation-2023-6>

<sup>18</sup> Traister, R. (2023, June 30). Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s inside job. *New York Magazine, Intelligencer*. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/robert-f-kennedy-jr-2024-presidential-campaign-democratic-primary.html>

<sup>19</sup> Abels, G., Terreri Ramos, J., & Romero, L. (2023, June 28). *No evidence atrazine in the water supply is causing more kids to identify as transgender*. *PolitiFact*. <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2023/jun/28/robert-f-kennedy-jr/no-evidence-atrazine-in-the-water-supply-is-causin/>

<sup>20</sup> Middlemass, K. (2025, February 6). *RFK Jr.'s history of medical misinformation raises concerns over HHS nomination*. *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/rfk-jr-s-history-of-medical-misinformation-raises-concerns-over-hhs-nomination/>

<sup>21</sup> McDonald, J. (2024, August 23). *RFK Jr. incorrectly denies past remarks on vaccine safety and effectiveness*. *FactCheck.org*, A Project of The Annenberg Public Policy Center. (Originally published 2023, November 8; clarified 2023, November 13). <https://www.factcheck.org/2023/11/scicheck-rfk-jr-incorrectly-denies-past-remarks-on-vaccine-safety-and-effectiveness/>

<sup>22</sup> Smith, M. R. (2021, December 15). How a Kennedy built an anti-vaccine juggernaut amid covid-19. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/how-rfk-jr-built-anti-vaccine-juggernaut-amid-covid-4997be1bcf591fe8b7f1f90d16c9321e>

<sup>23</sup> Fridman, L. (2023, July 6). *Robert F. Kennedy Jr.: CIA, Power, Corruption, War, Freedom, and Meaning* | Lex Fridman Podcast #388 [Video, 1:56:06]. YouTube. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpTbkw5uD-o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpTbkw5uD-o)

<sup>24</sup> Stein, R. (2019, March 4). A large study provides more evidence that MMR vaccines don't cause autism. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/03/04/699997613/a-large-study-provides-more-evidence-that-mmr-vaccines-dont-cause-autism>

<sup>25</sup> Smith, M. R., & Swenson, A. (2023, July 31). RFK Jr. says he's not anti-vaccine. his record shows the opposite. It's one of many inconsistencies. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/rfk-kennedy-election-2024-president-campaign-621c9e9641381a1b2677df9de5a09731>

Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine caused autism. This research was later debunked, as it was found that Wakefield knowingly falsified and fabricated data to produce his desired results.<sup>26</sup> In 2004, journalist Brian Deer published a piece in the British magazine *The Sunday Times* revealing the conflicts of interest in Wakefield's study.<sup>27</sup> Sixteen well-conducted, large population-based studies have shown no link between the MMR vaccine and autism.<sup>28</sup> Wakefield and his colleagues were ultimately found guilty of serious ethical misconduct and deliberate misrepresentation of research events and findings by Britain's General Medical Council sWakefield lost his medical license, and later, in 2011, the medical journal that published the study retracted it.<sup>29</sup>

Despite Wakefield's discreditation and the growing body of evidence disproving a link between vaccines and autism, RFK Jr. latched on to the belief that vaccines cause autism. In June 2005, RFK Jr. published a piece in *Salon* and *Rolling Stone* entitled "Deadly Immunity,"<sup>30</sup> in which he claimed mercury in vaccines caused autism. He attributed thimerosal to rising rates of autism diagnoses in childhood. RFK Jr.'s article alleged that most childhood vaccines contain 187 times the amount of mercury that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) consider safe. The piece also stated that children were being administered 24 vaccines containing mercury in them. Both claims were and remain untrue. Before ultimately removing the article from their websites altogether, *Salon* and *Rolling Stone* issued a correction:

"After publication of the June 16 story "Deadly Immunity," Salon and Rolling Stone corrected an error that misstated the level of ethylmercury received by infants injected with all their shots by the age of six months. It was 187 micrograms — an amount forty percent, not 187 times, greater than the EPA's limit for daily exposure to methylmercury... [Correction made 7/01/05]"<sup>31</sup>

RFK Jr. not only misrepresented the level of mercury in the vaccines, but also the type of mercury<sup>32</sup>, an incredibly important distinction. At high levels, methylmercury can be toxic, but thimerosal contains a different kind of mercury called ethylmercury. Ethylmercury is processed and cleared more quickly by the human body and is considered to be far less toxic. By misrepresenting the scale and type of mercury in vaccines, RFK Jr. perpetuated misinformation about one of the most salient defenses we have against disease.

The article "Deadly Immunity" also cited the work of Mark and David Geier, a father-son team of researchers who claimed to find a correlation between thimerosal and "neurological damage in children."<sup>33</sup> There have been nine studies conducted or funded by the CDC since 2003 that found no link between vaccines containing thimerosal and autism;<sup>34,35</sup> "[t]hese studies also found no link between the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine and ASD in children." The Geiers have been widely discredited in the years since due to experimentations on children and David Geier impersonating a physician.<sup>36</sup>

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26 Rao, T. S. S., & Andrade, C. (2011, April-June). The MMR vaccine and autism Sensation, refutation, retraction, and fraud. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 53(2), 95–96. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.82529>

27 Deer, B. (2004, February 22). Revealed: MMR research scandal. *The Times*. <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/science/article/revealed-mmr-research-scandal-7nfcfntn8mjq>

28 Hartman, M. (2025, March 19). *Why Experts Have Concluded That Vaccines Do Not Cause Autism*. Johns Hopkins, Bloomberg School of Public Health. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/vaccines-do-not-cause-autism>

29 Eggertson L. (2010, March 9). Lancet retracts 12-year-old article linking autism to MMR vaccines. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 182(4), E199–E200. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-3179>

30 Kennedy, R. F. (2005, June 16). Deadly immunity. *Salon/Rolling Stone*. [https://web.archive.org/web/20160328154622/http://www.robertkennedyjr.com/articles/2005\\_june\\_16.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20160328154622/http://www.robertkennedyjr.com/articles/2005_june_16.html)

31 Lauerman, K. (2011, January 16). Correcting our record. *Salon*. [https://www.salon.com/2011/01/16/dangerous\\_immunity/](https://www.salon.com/2011/01/16/dangerous_immunity/)

32 Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, reviewed by MD Offit, P.A. (2020, June 1). *Vaccine ingredients: Thimerosal*. CHOP Vaccine Education Center. <https://www.chop.edu/vaccine-education-center/vaccine-safety/vaccine-ingredients/thimerosal>

33 Jewett, C., Baumgaertner Nunn, E., & Gay Stolberg, S. (2025, March 27). RFK Jr. turns to a discredited vaccine researcher for autism study. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/27/health/rfk-jr-autism-vaccines.html>

34 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, July 31). *Autism and Vaccines*. CDC Vaccine Safety. <https://web.archive.org/web/20241229234515/https://www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/about/autism.html>. Retrieved 2024, Dec 30.

35 Hviid, A., Stellfeld, M., Wohlfahrt, J., & Melbye, M. (2003). Association between thimerosal-containing vaccine and autism. *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, 290(13), 1763–1766. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.290.13.1763>

36 Edwards, E., & Zadrozny, B. (2025, March 26). HHS taps anti-vaccine activist to look at debunked links between autism and vaccines, sources say. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/hhs-taps-anti-vaccine-activist-look-debunked-links-autism-vaccines-sou-rcna198214>

In 2014, RFK Jr. edited *Thimerosal: Let The Science Speak*,<sup>37</sup> in which he again applauded the Geiers. In 2016, Kennedy coauthored *Vaccine Villains: What the American Public Should Know About the Industry*.<sup>38</sup> RFK Jr., the Geiers, and other associates continue to push narratives about vaccines and neurodevelopmental disabilities that stigmatize autism and perpetuate vaccine hesitancy.

RFK Jr. has said that vaccines are “the only medical product or medical device that is allowed to get a license without engaging in safety tests” and that none of the vaccines in the recommended childhood vaccine schedule have ever been subject to a pre-licensing placebo-controlled trial. This is not true.<sup>39</sup>

## Children’s Health Defense

In 2007, Eric Gladen founded the World Mercury Project, an advocacy organization focused specifically on thimerosal exposure. RFK Jr. would join the board of the World Mercury Project in 2015 and eventually become board chair. In 2018, he transformed the organization into the Children’s Health Defense, proclaiming the organization’s mission was to rid the world of chronic childhood health conditions by eliminating toxic exposure. As noted previously, CHD established a reputation for spreading vaccine misinformation, harmful rhetoric about people with disabilities, and advocating for policies that limit vaccine access.

In 2019, CHD unsuccessfully sued New York over the state’s vaccine mandates during a measles outbreak and encouraged families to abstain from vaccinating their children against measles.<sup>40,41</sup> The judge found the law was not designed to target or show hostility towards religious beliefs and the risk of measles demonstrated a public health necessity. CHD’s popularity grew during the COVID-19 public health emergency. During this time, Children’s Health Defense’s revenue surged, from \$3 million in 2019 to \$7 million in 2020 and later \$16 million in 2021.<sup>42</sup> The COVID-19 public health emergency gave anti-vaccine activists traction and prominence, including RFK Jr., who spoke about “conspiracies by government officials and Big Pharma operatives and claimed falsely that the Pfizer COVID-19 shot kills more people than it saves.”<sup>43</sup>

As CHD chairman, RFK Jr. filed a petition in May 2021,<sup>44</sup> requesting that the FDA rescind authorization for all COVID-19 vaccines and abstain from approving future COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>45</sup> In the petition, he claimed “the current risks of serious adverse events or deaths outweigh the benefits” and that “existing, approved drugs provide highly effective prophylaxis and treatment against COVID-19”, in a reference to ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine, even though those treatments had already been deemed ineffective in fighting COVID-19.<sup>46,47</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy, R. F., Jr. (2014). *Thimerosal: Let the science speak: The evidence supporting the immediate removal of mercury, a known neurotoxin, from vaccines*. Skyhorse Publishing.

<sup>38</sup> Kennedy, R. F., Jr., & Dachel, A. (2016). *Vaccine villains: What the American public should know about the industry*. Skyhorse Publishing.

<sup>39</sup> Vaccines are subjected to safety tests. All vaccines start with a placebo-controlled trial. When improvements are made and a new vaccine is produced, the newer vaccine is tested against the previously approved version as it would be unethical to withhold a vaccine from a child and leave them vulnerable to a disease when a product already exists to protect them against disease.

<sup>40</sup> Bond, S. (2024, December 4). Inside RFK Jr.’s nonprofit’s legal battles over vaccines and public health. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/03/nx-s1-5198506/rfk-jr-anti-vaccine-chd-lawsuits>

<sup>41</sup> Rodriguez, B. (2025, April 18). RFK Jr. says he wants to curb measles. His former nonprofit keeps undermining his message. *The 19th*. <https://19thnews.org/2025/04/rfk-jr-measles-nonprofit-vaccine-safety/>

<sup>42</sup> Smith, M. R. (2021, December 15). How a Kennedy built an anti-vaccine juggernaut amid covid-19. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/how-rfk-jr-built-anti-vaccine-juggernaut-amid-covid-4997be1bcf591fe8b7f1f90d16c9321e>

<sup>43</sup> Smith, M. R. (2021, December 15). How a Kennedy built an anti-vaccine juggernaut amid covid-19. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/how-rfk-jr-built-anti-vaccine-juggernaut-amid-covid-4997be1bcf591fe8b7f1f90d16c9321e>

<sup>44</sup> FDA, Citizen Petition from Scientific Advisory Board on behalf of Children’s Health Defense (May 17, 2021), <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FDA-2021-P-0460-0001>

<sup>45</sup> Jewett, C. (2025, January 17). RFK Jr. sought to stop Covid vaccinations 6 months after rollout. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/17/health/rfk-jr-covid-vaccines.html>

<sup>46</sup> Merck. (2021, February 4). *Merck Statement on Ivermectin use During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Media, Company Statements. <https://www.merck.com/news/merck-statement-on-ivermectin-use-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). (2020, July 1). *FDA cautions against use of hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine for COVID-19 outside of the hospital setting or a clinical trial due to risk of heart rhythm problems*. Drug Safety and Availability. <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-cautions-against-use-hydroxychloroquine-or-chloroquine-covid-19-outside-hospital-setting-or>

During his tenure at CHD, RFK Jr. and four of his advisors made \$3.2 million and he personally collected \$2.5 million in referral fees from law firm Wisner Baum.<sup>48,49</sup> In addition to the focus on vaccines, Kennedy continued to target autism. He made multiple attempts to link autism and acetaminophen during his time at Children's Health Defense.<sup>50,51</sup>

RFK Jr., now HHS Secretary, continues his fixation on autism and elevates CHD's goals of promoting anti-vaccination messaging and unproven alternative treatments for measles, COVID-19, and other diseases.<sup>52</sup>

## Federal Public Health Programs and Bodies

RFK Jr. and other anti-vaccine activists argue that the pharmaceutical industry, including vaccine manufacturers, have the government in its pocket. As one of the largest business sectors in the country, the pharmaceutical industry has considerable power. Vaccine manufacturers are necessary stakeholders in infectious disease response and prevention strategy. By questioning the motives, composition and character of the federal public health apparatus and members of its bodies, RFK Jr. and his allies take advantage of an existing decline in social trust to build support for their agenda. This is, by definition, a conspiracy theory.

## The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) is a crucial piece of the vaccine safety apparatus. ACIP was established in 1964, primarily tasked with advising the Surgeon General about the safety and efficacy of new vaccines. Over the years, ACIP and its responsibilities evolved to what they are today—a committee that makes recommendations to the CDC about vaccine approvals, vaccine schedules, and other immunization technology, like monoclonal antibodies. It reviews the results of vaccine safety trials to determine whether to recommend a vaccine and for what use. Their recommendations affect the public's ability to access vaccines. ACIP recommendations are specifically tied to coverage under the Vaccines For Children Program and the ACA marketplace by Section 1928 of the Social Security Act and Section 2713 of the Public Health Service Act, respectively.<sup>53,54</sup>

ACIP has up to “19 voting members who have clinical, scientific, and public health expertise in immunization,” holds public meetings three times a year to review evidence and vote on recommendations, and has strengthened the U.S. immunization program.<sup>55</sup> The members of ACIP are required to make their conflicts of interest public and recuse themselves from voting on products for which they have disclosed a conflict of interest.<sup>56,57</sup> Vaccine manufacturers are

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48 Armour, S. (2025, July 15). Vested interests. Influence muscle. At RFK Jr.'s HHS, it's not pharma. It's wellness. *KFF Health News*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/07/15/health/hhs-kennedy-pharma-wellness-kff-health-news>

49 U.S. Senate Committee on Finance's hearing to consider the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, 119th Congress. (2025).

<https://www.finance.senate.gov/hearings/hearingto-consider-the-nomination-of-robert-f-kennedy-jr-of-california-to-be-secretary-of-health-and-human-services>

50 Kennedy, Jr., R. F. (2022, July 29). The authors of a new review of the drug acetaminophen, sold under the brand names Tylenol and Panadol, called for the immediate end of the use of the drug in infants and children. *X*. <https://x.com/RobertKennedyJr/status/1553075917748068352?s=20>

51 Kennedy, Jr., R. F. (2023, January 11). Hundreds of “Tylenol lawsuits” already have been filed against retailers and manufacturers of acetaminophen — but that number could soon reach into the thousands, according to an attorney who spoke to The Defender. *X*. <https://x.com/RobertKennedyJr/status/1613295831943204866?s=20>

52 Rodriguez, B. (2025, April 8). Parents are receiving mixed messages about measles from RFK Jr.. *The 19th*. <https://19thnews.org/2025/04/rfk-jr-measles-parents-mixed-messages/>

53 Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1396s [https://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title19/1928.htm](https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title19/1928.htm)

54 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 42 U.S.C. § 300gg-13 (2010).

55 Sekar, K. (2025, September 15). *The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)*. Congress.gov. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12317>

56 Young, L. J. (2025, June 10). How RFK, Jr.'s Dismissal of CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices Will Affect U.S. Vaccine Access. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-rfk-jr-s-dismissal-of-cdcs-advisory-committee-on-immunization-practices/>;

57 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (n.d.). *Conflicts of Interest Disclosures of ACIP Members*. Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Retrieved January 21, 2026, from <https://www.cdc.gov/acip/disclosures/by-member.html>

invited to present results of studies, but they do not “provide financial or other support to ACIP or its members.”<sup>58</sup> RFK Jr. has characterized ACIP in recent years as rife with conflicts of interest, despite evidence to the contrary.<sup>59</sup>

## Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

The Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP)<sup>60</sup> is a no-fault alternative to the traditional legal system to compensate people thought to be injured by one of the recommended childhood vaccines. Sec. Kennedy has stated that he believes the VICP has been corrupted,<sup>61</sup> and that it maliciously squashes any claims of vaccine injury in service of protecting Big Pharma’s bottom line. The reality is more nuanced.

In 1986, Congress passed the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act, creating the VICP and the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). In the years leading up to its establishment, many parents began to sue vaccine manufacturers, alleging that their children had been harmed by pertussis (DTP) and MMR vaccines. In the 1980s, after a wave of 250 lawsuits totaling \$3 billion in damages, many vaccine manufacturers began to withdraw from vaccine production, leading to vaccine shortages. During this decade, the number of companies manufacturing vaccines went from over twenty to less than four, as they couldn’t afford the litigation. Only one manufacturer of the DTP vaccine remained operational in the United States the year the VICP was established. Congress decided it was better to compensate alleged vaccine injuries than continue to disincentivize the manufacturing of life-saving vaccines. Extensive follow-up research has shown while the DTP vaccine was associated with an extremely rare risk of febrile seizures, no association with neurological harm was found.<sup>62</sup>

The VICP process is less adversarial than the court system as the injury table assumes injury, the process is shorter than traditional tort trials, and still allows for a civil trial if the family is not pleased with the outcome.

ACIP recommended vaccines are eligible under VICP under the vaccine injury table. Another committee, the Advisory Commission on Childhood Vaccines (ACCV), decides what constitutes a compensable vaccine injury. Between these two committees, the VICP can be drastically reshaped without legislation.

## The Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee

The Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) was first created in 2000 as a response to a growing concern among parents about the increasing prevalence of autism. The IACC was formalized as a federal advisory committee in 2006 with the passage of the Combatting Autism Act of 2006, later reauthorized as the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support (CARES) Act.

The constitution of the IACC has changed over time, including the requirements that govern its membership. For one, the IACC has grown substantially as more federal agencies have opted to participate. As there must be a comparable number of federal and public members, the number of public members of the IACC have also grown. In recent years, the IACC has had a substantial increase in participation from self-advocates and researchers. The IACC serves a vital role in producing the IACC strategic plan, which is meant to inform what research areas should be prioritized by NIH when they decide how to award research dollars allocated by the Autism CARES Act. As of January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026, the IACC had not met

58 Smith, J. C., Hinman, A. R., & Pickering, L. K. (2014). History and evolution of the advisory committee on immunization practices—United States, 1964-2014. *MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report*, 63(42), 955–958. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5779473/>

59 University of Southern California (USC), Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics, & Millman, J. (2025, August 18). *Conflicts of Interest on CDC Vaccine Panel Were at Historic Lows Before RFK Jr. Dismissal* [Press release]. USC Schaeffer. <https://schaeffer.usc.edu/research/cdc-acip-vaccine-conflicts-rfk-jr/>; Smith, J. C. (2010). The structure, role, and procedures of the U.S. Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). *Vaccine*, 28(1), A68–A75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2010.02.037>

60 Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). (2019, March 5). *Vaccines save lives by preventing disease*. National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program. <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/vicp/vicp-fact-sheet.pdf>

61 Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. [@SecKennedy]. (2025, July 28). *The 1986 Vaccine Act gave vaccine makers immunity against lawsuits by children who suffer vaccine injuries. The statute, and numerous* [Post]. X. <https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1949875225904005367>

62 Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, reviewed by MD Offit, P.A. (2025, May 8). *Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis: The Diseases & Vaccines*. CHOP Vaccine Education Center. <https://www.chop.edu/vaccine-education-center/vaccine-details/diphtheria-tetanus-and-pertussis-vaccines>

once during the second Trump administration.

The last meeting of the IACC was on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025 to discuss the Summary of Advances, a collection of the top research breakthroughs as determined by members of the IACC.<sup>63</sup> It was not a full public meeting with a standard comment period. At this meeting, several resources were promised for the coming months including a 2024 update to the strategic plan focused on co-occurring conditions and past fiscal years' portfolio analyses which show the specific projects funded by NIH and what strategic plan objectives they fulfill. None of these resources have been released.<sup>64</sup>

## Discussion and Analysis

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Sec. Kennedy's tenure at HHS has far-reaching and unprecedented impacts. The past year was characterized by a growing distrust in federal public health leadership, fragmented public health infrastructure, and increased marginalization of people with disabilities. At the same time, vaccine hesitancy and vaccine-preventable deaths have accelerated while the rates of vaccine-preventable disease, namely measles and pertussis, have increased significantly.<sup>65</sup> State governments, professional organizations, and community organizations are attempting to fill the role of public health authorities and correct the misinformation coming from HHS. The permanence of these changes and their impacts beyond this administration remain unclear, but it is historically much harder to build trust than it is to destroy it.

The timeline demonstrates Sec. Kennedy is incredibly intentional with his communications. Upon examination, it is clear that Sec. Kennedy and the administration follow a consistent playbook to influence public opinion and challenge scientific consensus.

The ultimate goal is to polarize an issue to provide political cover for a policy action. Sec. Kennedy often begins this process by making an outlandish claim not backed by scientific evidence. This is often made through video posts on X (formerly Twitter) and citations are rarely provided. The claim is usually about a non-existent or inaccurately portrayed public health practice or statistic. The belief is typically established by MAHA leaders and known among MAHA adherents. Following initial criticism, HHS will cite a source with insufficient evidence, flawed methodology, or the expertise of a fringe scientist to back up the claim. Sec. Kennedy and his allies will uplift the claim and portray the scientific consensus and its proponents as compromised by conflicts of interest even when none exist. These tactics mirror the tobacco industry and fossil fuel industry's response to studies illustrating the harms of smoking and climate change, respectively.<sup>66,67</sup> Sec. Kennedy and HHS leadership use these citations as pretense to allegedly launch a review that consistently results in policy changes aligning with Sec. Kennedy's pre-existing beliefs. In some cases a review was not launched and the policy change was implemented immediately. Staff members or scientists employed by HHS who dissent from this opinion have been consistently fired, forced to resign, or targeted by a reduction in force. Evidence supporting their disagreements with new HHS policy is routinely ignored. Many of these employees have later been publicly targeted and shamed by the administration or its allies. When HHS portrays themselves as the crusaders for scientific truth in the face of the mainstream medical community, it takes advantage of an existing skepticism of authority. This stronghold the public to believe the narrative promoted by the Secretary despite external examinations of the evidence and negative public response.

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63 IACC Summary of Advances Discussion (Virtual). (2025). [Livestream Video]. In *Meeting of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC)*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). <https://iacc.hhs.gov/meetings/iacc-meetings/2025/summary-of-advances/january14/>

64 Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC). (n.d.). *Publications Overview*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). <https://iacc.hhs.gov/publications/>

65 Winny, A. (2025, December 17). *What Public Health Won and Lost in 2025*. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/public-health-in-2025-year-in-review>

66 Reed, G., Hendlin, Y., Desikan, A., MacKinney, T., Berman, E., & Goldman, G. T. (2021c). The disinformation playbook: how industry manipulates the science-policy process—and how to restore scientific integrity. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 42(4), 622–634. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41271-021-00318-6>

67 Union of Concerned Scientists. (2018). The Disinformation Playbook. In *Featured Reports & Multimedia*. <https://www.ucs.org/resources/disinformation-playbook>

## From Misinformation to Implementation

RFK Jr. was already a controversial figure before he became Secretary of HHS. Several high ranking Republicans in the Senate were uncomfortable with Kennedy's nomination before and after his hearing, and he was nearly not confirmed.<sup>68,69</sup> RFK Jr. was able to secure the necessary votes due to promises made to Senators Susan Collins and Bill Cassidy, and a meeting between Vice President JD Vance and Senator Cassidy.<sup>70</sup> Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Bill Cassidy publicized these promises, which included “work[ing] within the current vaccine approval and safety monitor systems, and not establish[ing] parallel systems” and to “maintain the Centers for Disease Control Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices without changes.” As Secretary, Kennedy has violated these promises.<sup>71,72</sup>

## Reshaping HHS leadership and priorities

Sec. Kennedy's early tenure at HHS was defined by large-scale reductions-in-force (RIFs) and a freeze of external communications. The RIFs were executed as part of an administration-wide initiative by the Department of Government Efficiency and the Office of Management and Budget with Sec. Kennedy's cooperation. The movement towards eliminating entire offices and halving agency staff has been a common tactic throughout the Trump administration. The communication freeze greatly reduced transparency, in contrast to Sec. Kennedy's stated priorities. Stakeholders and watchdogs had limited insight into HHS' operations from February to April. Kennedy utilized these events to reshape leadership at HHS, hire vaccine skeptics like David Geier and Lyn Redwood into advisory roles, and push out career staff like Peter Marks. All of these changes enabled Kennedy to seamlessly shift priorities within HHS.<sup>73,74,75</sup> Sec. Kennedy and HHS spokespeople defended these decisions by claiming Marks was not “committed to transparency,”<sup>76</sup> attributing RIFs to reducing inefficiencies,<sup>77</sup> and frequently refusing to comment on controversial hires. One hire that went largely under the radar is William Stuart Burns as a senior adviser at the CDC.<sup>78</sup> Burns played a major role in reshaping the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.<sup>79</sup> Top officials at the CDC would resign throughout the year, with multiple leaving the agency after Sec. Kennedy fired CDC Director Monarez for refusing to sign off on ACIP recommendations

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68 Karni, A. (2025, January 29). Kennedy's Fate Rests in Hands of a Small Group of Republicans. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/29/us/politics/rfk-jr-senate-vote.html>

69 Samantaroy, S. (2025, January 30). Key Senate Republican Expresses Doubts About Advancing RFK Jr's HHS Nomination to Full Floor. *Health Policy Watch*. <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/key-senate-republican-expresses-doubts-about-advancing-rfk-jrs-hhs-nomination-to-full-floor/>

70 Simmons-Duffin, S. (2025, February 4). RFK Jr. appears on his way to being Trump's health secretary after a party-line vote. *Houston Public Media*. <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/npr/2025/02/04/nx-s1-5285682/rfk-jr-appears-on-his-way-to-being-trumps-health-secretary-after-a-party-line-vote/>

71 Mandavilli, A. (2026, January 5). Kennedy Scales Back the Number of Vaccines Recommended for Children. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/05/health/children-vaccines-cdc-kennedy.html>

72 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, June 9). *HHS Takes Bold Step to Restore Public Trust in Vaccines by Reconstituting ACIP* [Press Release]. <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restore-public-trust-vaccines-acip.html>

73 HHS Announces Transformation to Make America Healthy Again. (2025, March 27). [Press release]. <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restructuring-doge.html>

74 Herper, M., Branswell, H., McFarling, U. L., Lawrence, L., & Mast, J. (2025, March 31). Peter Marks, FDA's top vaccine regulator, forced out. *STAT*. <https://www.statnews.com/2025/03/28/fda-peter-marks-cber-director-resigns-rfk-jr/>

75 Cirruzzo, C. (2025, July 14). The growing influence of vaccine skeptics inside HHS. *STAT*. <https://www.statnews.com/2025/07/14/antivaccine-influence-inside-hhs-public-health-experts-alarmed-rfk-jr-hires-vaccine-skeptics/>

76 Lovelace, Jr., B. (2025, March 28). Top FDA vaccine official resigns, blaming “misinformation.” *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/fdas-top-vaccine-scientist-dr-peter-marks-rcna198682>

77 Parduhn, R. P. (2025, April 2). 'A cruel April Fool's joke': HHS layoffs characterized by confusion, errors. *Healthcare Dive*. <https://www.healthcaredive.com/news/hhs-layoffs-rif-rollout-chaos-kennedy-doge/744172/>

78 Stuart Burns - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Feb. 2025-), senior adviser to the Director - Biography | *LegiStorm*. (n.d.). [Dataset]. [https://www.legistorm.com/person/bio/18389/William\\_Stuart\\_Burns.html](https://www.legistorm.com/person/bio/18389/William_Stuart_Burns.html)

79 Jones, J. (2025, November 14). RFK Jr. is completely reshaping vaccine policy. This is the man helping him do it. *MS NOW*. <https://www.ms.now/analysis/robert-f-kennedy-jr-vaccines-stuart-burns-hhs-rcna220029>

without review.<sup>80,81,82</sup> Cynthia Nevison, Mark Blaxill, and Dr. Ralph Abraham, all of whom have expressed anti-vaccine views, were brought into the fold at CDC.<sup>83</sup>

As Sec. Kennedy was consolidating his inner circle, he was also laying the groundwork for future action. Roundtable events and MAHA social media personalities kept the base engaged throughout the spring. In April 2025, he promised that we would know the cause of autism by September.<sup>84</sup> HHS released the MAHA report in May with major citation errors, including false studies and misrepresenting study conclusions.<sup>85</sup> At the beginning of June, he removed all sitting ACIP members. He implied the former members were compromised by conflicts of interest.<sup>86</sup> By the end of the month, he installed an all-new panel primarily consisting of individuals who have expressed varying degrees of vaccine skepticism and the new ACIP held its first meeting.<sup>87</sup> The remaining ACIP meetings in 2025 contained inaccurate and incomplete presentations, including one on thimerosal by Lyn Redwood, and wording of the votes frequently confused the committee of policy implications. In the months since, ACIP changed the recommendations for the COVID-19, MMR vaccine, and hepatitis B vaccines.<sup>88</sup>

Kennedy has gotten bolder in making unilateral decisions about vaccine safety without the input of key vaccine science officials,<sup>89</sup> or even his own hand-selected ACIP, including reducing the number of vaccines on the childhood vaccination schedule,<sup>90</sup> an unprecedented move. The vaccines removed from the schedule provide protection against rotavirus, COVID-19, influenza, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, meningococcal, and RSV.<sup>91</sup>

## Where the Money Goes: Grant Cancellations and New Initiatives

Implementing the MAHA Agenda would be incomplete without significant funding and research changes. In March, HHS canceled \$11.4 billion in federal grants to state and community health departments, which had been allocated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and were used to respond to outbreaks and provide access to immunizations. In August, HHS canceled \$500 million in grants on mRNA vaccine research,<sup>92</sup> because Sec. Kennedy claimed that “mRNA

80 Mandavilli, A. (2025, June 18). Why a Vaccine Expert Left the C.D.C.: ‘Americans Are Going to Die.’ The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/18/health/havers-cdc-vaccines-kennedy.html>

81 Gounder, C. (2025, August 29). Senior CDC officials resign after Monarez’s ouster, citing concerns over scientific independence - KFF Health News. KFF Health News. <https://kffhealthnews.org/news/article/senior-cdc-officials-resign-susan-monarez-ouster-concerns-over-scientific-independence/>

82 Stobbe, M. (2025, August 27). CDC director Susan Monarez is fired and other agency leaders resign. AP. <https://apnews.com/article/cdc-director-susan-monarez-50dfbec849b53b4593755d2e6e616687>

83 Gardner, S. (2025, December 3). E&E News: Cynthia Nevison, climate researcher with anti-vaccine ties, joins CDC. E&E News by Politico. <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/12/03/cynthia-nevison-climate-researcher-with-anti-vaccine-ties-joins-cdc-ee-00673881>

84 Rupar, A. (2025, April 10). Aaron Rupar (@atrupar.com). Bluesky Social. <https://bsky.app/profile/atrupar.com/post/3lmhzzlotzbze>

85 Jacobs, P. (2025, May 30). Trump officials downplay fake citations in high-profile report on children’s health. Science. <https://www.science.org/content/article/trump-officials-downplay-fake-citations-high-profile-report-children-s-health>

86 Kennedy, Jr., R. F. (2025, June 9). Today, we are taking a bold step in restoring public trust by totally reconstituting the Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP). A clean sweep is necessary to reestablish public confidence in vaccine science. The entire world once looked to American health regulators for guidance, inspiration, scientific impartiality, and unimpeachable integrity. Public trust has eroded. Only through radical transparency and gold standard science, will we earn it back. X. <https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1932192142748795114?s=20>

87 HHS Takes Bold Step to Restore Public Trust in Vaccines by Reconstituting ACIP. (2025, June 9). [Press release]. <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restore-public-trust-vaccines-acip.html>

88 Recommendations include: Removing thimerosal from multi-dose flu vaccines, despite evidence showing it does not cause neurodevelopmental disabilities and is a key preservative for multi-dose flu vaccines as alternatives would require new testing; Separating the MMR vaccine, which could lead to fewer people getting vaccinated; and Weakening COVID and hepatitis B vaccine guidance, which could restrict vaccine access and lead to spread of infection.

89 Restoring Trust Through Radical Transparency: Reviewing Recent Events at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Implications for Children’s Health, 119th Cong. (2025) (testimony of Debra Houry).

90 Mandavilli, A. (2025a, January 5). Kennedy Scales Back the Number of Vaccines Recommended for Children. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/05/health/children-vaccines-cdc-kennedy.html>

91 Jenco, M., Schering, S., & Stangland, S. (2025, January 5). AAP: CDC plan to remove universal childhood vaccine recommendations ‘dangerous and unnecessary.’ AAP News. <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/34104/AAP-CDC-plan-to-remove-universal-childhood-vaccine?autologincheck=redirected>

92 Halpert, M. (2025, August 5). RFK Jr cancels \$500m in mRNA vaccine development in the US. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c74dzdddvmjo>

technology poses more risks than benefits for these respiratory viruses.”<sup>93,94</sup> This decision alarmed vaccine and infectious disease experts,<sup>95</sup> who say that mRNA vaccines have saved millions of lives and are considered safe for use.<sup>96</sup> These experts have emphasized that mRNA technology is a vital tool to fight a future pandemic due to its shorter development window, meaning it can more quickly respond to emergent viruses.<sup>97</sup> Cutting off this research curbs future innovation, and framing mRNA vaccines as risky could unfairly tarnish public perception of existing vaccines created with mRNA technology.

HHS also shifted research funding to support projects that more closely reflect Sec. Kennedy’s beliefs about vaccines and autism. According to an analysis from Reuters, NIH reduced funding for autism-related research by an estimated \$31 million to \$116 million from \$147 million in the first four months of 2025.<sup>98</sup> Significant funding was pulled from research that included reference to diversity or gender, factors that could contribute to different behaviors and representations of autism and potentially lead researchers to better understanding how to support the needs of autistic people. In September, the CDC announced its intention to award a non-competitive contract to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute to research the debunked link between autism and vaccines without fanfare.<sup>99</sup> NIH has failed to produce a budget estimate for autism research spending in fiscal year 2026 as required by the Autism CARES Act. Advocates and watchdogs are concerned and in the dark about how Autism CARES funds are being spent. There were also no meetings of the IACC in 2025, statute requires at least two per year. In September 2025, NIH awarded \$50 million to thirteen beneficiaries as part of the Autism Data Science Initiative, with a major focus on the relationship between etiology, genetics, and environmental exposures.<sup>100</sup> The results and methodologies of these research projects will inform policy, medicine, and public opinion in the years to come.

## Acetaminophen and Autism as a Case Study

Understanding the playbook implemented by Sec. Kennedy and his allies may be better serviced by examining a specific example. The attempt to link acetaminophen and autism arguably demonstrates this playbook most clearly. When Sec. Kennedy promised that we would know the cause of autism by September, many assumed HHS would say the cause is vaccines. Little was known about what the announcement would say until a *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) exclusive on September 5<sup>th</sup> claimed that the announcement would focus on prenatal acetaminophen use and folate deficiency as causes.<sup>101</sup> On September 9<sup>th</sup>, FDA Commissioner Marty Makary denied this reporting calling it “premature” and that work had not begun on the “autism report.”<sup>102</sup> The findings of the WSJ article would be confirmed at the September 22<sup>nd</sup> announcement.

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93 Stein, R. (2025, August 6). Public health experts dismayed by RFK Jr.’s defunding of mRNA vaccine research. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/08/06/nx-s1-5493544/rfk-defunding-mrna-vaccine-research>

94 Stein, R. (2025b, August 6). Public health experts dismayed by RFK Jr.’s defunding of mRNA vaccine research. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/08/06/nx-s1-5493544/rfk-defunding-mrna-vaccine-research>

95 Bennett, G., & Cuevas, K. (2025, August 7). Federal mRNA funding cut is “most dangerous public health decision” ever, expert says. PBS News. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/federal-mrna-funding-cut-is-most-dangerous-public-health-decision-ever-expert-says>

96 The Associated Press. (2025, August 6). RFK Jr. pulls \$500 million in funding for mRNA vaccine contracts. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/05/nx-s1-5493550/rfk-jr-funding-mrna-vaccine-development>

97 Halpert, M. (2025b, August 6). RFK Jr cancels \$500m in mRNA vaccine development in the US. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c74dzdddvmjo>

98 Respaud, R., & Dowdell, J. (2025, May 16). Exclusive: Trump administration defunds autism research in DEI and “gender ideology” purge. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/trump-administration-cut-autism-related-research-by-26-so-far-2025-05-16/>

99 SAM Acquisition 360. (n.d.). <https://sam.gov/workspace/contract/opp/280398e7b4b54c0fac7de5efcbb80a80/view>

100 Autism Data Science Initiative Funded Research | DPCPSI. (2025, December 17). <https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/autism-data-science-initiative/funded-research>

101 Whyte, L. E., & Subbaraman, N. (2025, September 5). RFK Jr., HHS to Link Autism to Tylenol Use in Pregnancy and Folate Deficiencies. The Wall Street Journal. [https://www.wsj.com/health/healthcare/rfk-jr-hhs-to-link-autism-to-tylenol-use-in-pregnancy-and-folate-deficiencies-e3acbb4c?gaa\\_at=eafs&gaa\\_n=AWEtstqetfwr\\_5-SXxW8tORCod\\_dsyplvdNzWs8g8CdCjIvP9i6F\\_HoVuXuP8UolKNN0%3D&gaa\\_ts=696447c3&gaa\\_sig=MPrxICz4msfm9vrh6egtBj39SqsVBRWC6tKxMrPL4UJaPrRoEURAmy6vghZ77VixUY3hyZKMN8VLov-oEuvTgA%3D%3D](https://www.wsj.com/health/healthcare/rfk-jr-hhs-to-link-autism-to-tylenol-use-in-pregnancy-and-folate-deficiencies-e3acbb4c?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWEtstqetfwr_5-SXxW8tORCod_dsyplvdNzWs8g8CdCjIvP9i6F_HoVuXuP8UolKNN0%3D&gaa_ts=696447c3&gaa_sig=MPrxICz4msfm9vrh6egtBj39SqsVBRWC6tKxMrPL4UJaPrRoEURAmy6vghZ77VixUY3hyZKMN8VLov-oEuvTgA%3D%3D)

102 FDA’s Makary says autism report isn’t written, calls WSJ story “Premature.” (2025, September 9). KFF Health News. <https://kffhealthnews.org/morning-breakout/fdas-makary-says-autism-report-isnt-written-calls-wsj-story-premature/>

Kennedy attempted to link autism and acetaminophen multiple times during his time at Children's Health Defense.<sup>103,104</sup> This was while a series of lawsuits were filed against Tylenol manufacturer, Kenvue, making the same claim. All federal lawsuits on this matter against Kenvue were dismissed in 2024. Sec. Kennedy also conferred with Andrea Baccarelli, author of an August 2025 review of studies finding a correlation between prenatal acetaminophen use and autism, ahead of the announcement. Baccarelli also served as an expert witness against Kenvue in a class action suit alleging Tylenol as a cause of autism.<sup>105</sup> Sec. Kennedy approached the announcement very intentionally. He drew heavy attention to Baccarelli's review, which consisted solely of association studies, but stopped short of calling it a confirmed cause, instead suggesting the review was delivering on "providing answers" to families of autistic people.<sup>106</sup> President Trump took a less cautious approach, urging parents, "do not take Tylenol."<sup>107</sup> This phase of the playbook is Kennedy attempting to legitimize his beliefs despite evidence to the contrary existing. Higher quality research performed with improved confounding variable control failed to find any link between autism and acetaminophen use.<sup>108,109,110</sup> By the nature of the studies conducted, nothing is completely conclusive, but the scientific-evidence highly suggests neither prenatal or postnatal acetaminophen use causes autism.

Sec. Kennedy and his allies defended their position throughout late September and early October. At a televised cabinet meeting on October 9<sup>th</sup>, Sec. Kennedy suggested circumcision is associated with acetaminophen use based on a 2015 and preprint of a yet-to-be published study.<sup>111</sup> One study did not measure acetaminophen use, while the other had several unaddressed confounding variables that could have contributed to the association between circumcision and autism. The latter study also did not suggest postnatal acetaminophen use as the cause.<sup>112</sup> Sec. Kennedy mentioned these studies in a now deleted X (formerly Twitter) post, but rather than addressing the aforementioned critiques, he argued against the claim that he said circumcision caused autism.<sup>113</sup> Sec. Kennedy purposefully uplifted weaker arguments against him to portray his position as more rational and scientific, while ignoring other criticisms. This stage of the playbook is usually followed by or concurrent with policy changes that align with Sec. Kennedy's beliefs. The FDA issued a notice to physicians about acetaminophen use during pregnancy that urged minimal use.<sup>114</sup> The FDA also issued the initial approval for leucovorin to be used to treat cerebral folate deficiency (CFD) in an effort to improve speech in certain

103 Kennedy, Jr., R. F. (2022, July 29). The authors of a new review of the drug acetaminophen, sold under the brand names Tylenol and Panadol, called for the immediate end of the use of the drug in infants and children. X. <https://x.com/RobertKennedyJr/status/1553075917748068352?s=20>

104 Kennedy, Jr., R. F. (2023, January 11). Hundreds of "Tylenol lawsuits" already have been filed against retailers and manufacturers of acetaminophen — but that number could soon reach into the thousands, according to an attorney who spoke to The Defender. X. <https://x.com/RobertKennedyJr/status/1613295831943204866?s=20>

105 Gerstein, A., & Niederhelman, E. (2025, September 24). Harvard's public health dean was paid \$150,000 to testify Tylenol causes autism. The Harvard Crimson. <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/9/24/autism-dean-public-health/>

106 President Trump, Secretary Kennedy Announce Bold Actions to Tackle Autism Epidemic. (2025, September 22). [Press release]. <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-trump-kennedy-autism-initiatives-leucovorin-tylenol-research-2025.html>

107 The White House. (2025, September 22). President Trump makes an announcement on medical and scientific findings for America's children – the White House [Video]. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/videos/president-trump-makes-an-announcement-on-medical-and-scientific-findings-for-americas-children/>

108 Ahlqvist VH, Sjöqvist H, Dalman C, et al. Acetaminophen Use During Pregnancy and Children's Risk of Autism, ADHD, and Intellectual Disability. *JAMA*. 2024;331(14):1205–1214. doi:10.1001/jama.2024.3172

109 Okubo, Y., Hayakawa, I., Sugitate, R., & Nariai, H. (2025). Maternal Acetaminophen Use and Offspring's Neurodevelopmental Outcome: A Nationwide Birth Cohort Study. *Paediatric and perinatal epidemiology*, 10.1111/ppe.70071. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppe.70071>

110 D'Antonio, F., Elena Flacco, M., & Della Valle, L. (2026). Prenatal paracetamol exposure and child neurodevelopment: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology, & Women's Health* [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanogw/article/PIIS3050-5038\(25\)00211-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanogw/article/PIIS3050-5038(25)00211-0/fulltext)

111 Dorn, S. (2025, October 9). Trump and RFK Jr. double down on unproven Tylenol-Autism link: 'We're doing the studies to make the proof.' *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/saradorn/2025/10/09/trump-and-rfk-jr-double-down-on-unproven-tylenol-autism-link-were-doing-the-studies-to-make-the-proof/>

112 Yandell, K. (2025, October 21). RFK Jr.'s inaccurate claims about tylenol, circumcision and autism - FactCheck.org. FactCheck.org. <https://www.factcheck.org/2025/10/rfk-jr-s-inaccurate-claims-about-tylenol-circumcision-and-autism/>

113 Hiltzik, M. (2025, October 14). Hiltzik: More on the dismantling of U.S. healthcare - Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2025-10-14/rfk-jr-tylenol-and-circumcision-the-lowdown#:~:text=Unsurprisingly%2C%20Kennedy's%20remark%20got%20extensive,proceeded%20to%20debunk%20the%20claim.&text=In%20trying%20to%20clarify%20his,address%20the%20paracetamol%20hypothesis%20directly.%E2%80%9D>

114 U.S. Food and Drug Administration (2025). Notice to Physicians on the Use of Acetaminophen During Pregnancy. Martin A. Makary, M.D., M.P.H..

autistic people and CMS took steps to provide coverage, all without the requisite research base.<sup>115</sup> MAHA social media personalities continue to spread these beliefs despite the latest review of the literature finding no link between autism and acetaminophen use and the largest study focused on leucovorin, CFD, and speech was retracted.<sup>116,117</sup>

Sec. Kennedy has reimagined HHS to enable his policy agenda. He generates public concern about chronic disease, disability, or other health issues and claims previous authorities addressing these topics were corrupted by conflicts of interest. He then consolidates decision-making power and encourages the resignation or fires dissenting staff. He then uses this authority and lack of substantive opposition to enact policy change and argues against strawmen throughout the process to bolster his own legitimacy. The administration promised a commitment to gold-standard science, we see these actions as a complete lack of scientific integrity. We are not alone in that view.

## Declining trust in federal public health leaders

Over the past year, trust in federal public health leaders has declined. Several polls have revealed that Americans have lost faith in public health officials.<sup>118</sup> More data is needed to pinpoint the specific events in the last year that have contributed the most to falling trust, but the data does indicate the administration's rejection of long-held scientific truths and constant turmoil at HHS is a consistent contributor. Notable events from the past year that align with the results of polling about the decline in trust in public health leaders include widespread RIFs at HHS, ousting of well-respected public health officials, measles outbreaks, and the overhaul of ACIP.

Throughout the last year, Sec. Kennedy has provided a constant stream of conflicting and often incorrect information. Through social media, Sec. Kennedy perpetuated false claims about mercury in vaccines,<sup>119</sup> the MMR vaccine,<sup>120</sup> mRNA vaccine technology,<sup>121</sup> and links between acetaminophen and autism, including a correlation between circumcision rates

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115 Office of the Commissioner. (2025, September 22). *FDA takes action to make a treatment available for autism symptoms*. U.S. Food And Drug Administration. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-takes-action-make-treatment-available-autism-symptoms>

116 D'Antonio, F., Elena Flacco, M., & Della Valle, L. (2026). Prenatal paracetamol exposure and child neurodevelopment: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology, & Women's Health* [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanogw/article/PIIS3050-5038\(25\)00211-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanogw/article/PIIS3050-5038(25)00211-0/fulltext)

117 Lloreda, C. L. (2026, February 9). Largest leucovorin-autism trial retracted. *The Transmitter: Neuroscience News and Perspectives*. <https://www.thetransmitter.org/spectrum/largest-leucovorin-autism-trial-retracted/>

118 A [poll conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health and de Beaumont Foundation](#) in March 2025 that found 44% of the public said that the new public health leaders in the current recently sworn-in Administration would make them trust health recommendations less than they used to.

Brownstein, M. (2025, April 29). *Poll: Many Americans say they will lose trust in public health recommendations under federal leadership*. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. <https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/poll-many-americans-say-they-will-lose-trust-in-public-health-recommendations-under-federal-leadership-changes/>

An August 2025 Annenberg Public Policy Center poll found that Americans' confidence in the "trustworthiness of U.S. health and science agencies" had declined since the current new Administration had taken office. Respondents' confidence in the trustworthiness of the CDC, FDA, and NIH had all dropped since September 2024. Thirty-nine percent of Americans believed that Secretary Kennedy was providing trustworthy public health information, while sixty percent lacked confidence in him.

Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania. (2025, September 22). *Public confidence in U.S. health agencies slides, fueled by declines among Democrats* [Press release]. The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. <https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/public-confidence-in-u-s-health-agencies-slides-fueled-by-declines-among-democrats/>

119 HHS Sec. Kennedy. [@SecKennedy]. (2025, November 3). *Now that America has removed mercury from all vaccines, I call on every global health authority to do the same — to ensure that no child, anywhere in the world, is ever exposed to this deadly neurotoxin again*. [Video attached] [Post] X. <https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1985452548996907456>

120 U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. [@HHSgov]. (2025, September 9). *This is a lie meant to send Americans into a panic. FACT: ACIP recommended that the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine be given as a standalone immunization rather than through the combination measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella (MMRV) vaccine*. ... [Repost from @rosadelauro] [Post] X.

<https://x.com/HHSGov/status/1969053203200364788>

121 HHS Sec. Kennedy. [@SecKennedy]. (2025, August 5). *We reviewed the science, listened to the experts, and acted. BARDA is terminating 22 mRNA vaccine development investments because the data show these vaccines fail to protect effectively against upper respiratory infections like COVID and flu. We're shifting that funding toward safer, broader vaccine platforms that remain effective even as viruses mutate*. [Post] X. <https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1952851097019633766>

and autism implied to be tied to postnatal and early childhood use of acetaminophen.<sup>122</sup>

The beliefs Sec. Kennedy shares on his social media accounts often lead to policy decisions undertaken at HHS. As the year progressed, Sec. Kennedy increasingly took unilateral action to make policy change. This pattern began in May when he unilaterally changed the COVID recommendations without going through ACIP.<sup>123</sup> Kennedy would later accept ACIP recommendations as Secretary in absence of a CDC director,<sup>124</sup> personally instruct the CDC to change its webpage on autism to allude to a potential link between vaccines and autism,<sup>125</sup> despite the agency's long-established view that there is not a connection. Most recently, he unilaterally modified the childhood vaccine schedule, even in absence of ACIP's recommendation.<sup>126</sup> Sec. Kennedy and HHS provided mixed messaging about vaccine safety and guidance. For example, the Secretary's views on the COVID vaccine seem to have shifted since he joined the President's Cabinet. He said that President Trump's Operation Warp Speed—which accelerated COVID vaccine development using mRNA technology—was a positive public health initiative despite years of criticizing the COVID vaccine.<sup>127</sup> But consistent with his past criticisms, Sec. Kennedy has implemented policies restricting access to COVID vaccines and argued that COVID and other infectious diseases are less dangerous than the vaccine created to inoculate against them. This messaging undermines decades of public health communication, sowing confusion and doubt about established vaccine science,<sup>128</sup> and have already contributed to decreased vaccination rates.<sup>129</sup> The undermining is the point. Creating confusion through official channels and bolstering views opposing the scientific consensus portrays an illusion of disagreement, creating the necessary cover for Sec. Kennedy and his allies to enact policy change.

Polling shows Americans believe childhood vaccinations are important, with vaccine skepticism remaining the minority view, but this skepticism has grown in recent years.<sup>130</sup> Following the administration's press conference linking autism and acetaminophen and ACIP's new COVID and MMR vaccination recommendations, KFF released a poll finding that a majority of the public disapproved of Sec. Kennedy's job performance and his handling of vaccine policy.<sup>131</sup> The poll revealed that half of the public “trust the CDC ‘a great deal’ or ‘fair amount’ to provide reliable information about vaccines – reflecting the lowest level of trust in the agency since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.” This suggests that Americans continue to believe in the science of vaccines, but they don't trust the federal government or Sec. Kennedy to give them accurate information.

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122 HHS Sec. Kennedy. [@SecKennedy]. (2025, October 10). *As usual, the mainstream media attacks me for something I didn't say in order to distract from the truth of what I did say. At yesterday's Cabinet meeting, I said: “There are two studies that show children who are circumcised early have double the rate of autism, and it's highly likely because they're given Tylenol.” ...* [Post] X. <https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1976679743408738739>

123 Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. [@SecKennedy]. (2025, May 27). *Today, the COVID vaccine for healthy children and healthy pregnant women has been removed from*

*@CDCgov recommended immunization schedule. Bottom line: it's common sense and it's good science. We are now one step closer to realizing @POTUS's promise to Make America Healthy Again* [Video attached] [Post]. X. <https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1927368440811008138>

124 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, June 2023). *HHS Adopts ACIP Recommendation to Remove Thimerosal from All U.S. Influenza Vaccines* [Press Release]. <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/thimerosal-mercury-removed-from-us-flu-vaccines-acip.html>

125 Stolberg, S.G. (2025, December 2). *Kennedy Says He Told C.D.C. to Change Website's Language on Autism and Vaccines.* *The New York Times.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/21/us/politics/rfk-jr-cdc-vaccines-autism-website.html>

126 Mandavilli, A. (2026, January 5). *Kennedy Scales Back the Number of Vaccines Recommended for Children.* *The New York Times.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/05/health/children-vaccines-cdc-kennedy.html>

127 *The President's 2026 Health Care Agenda: Hearing before the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, 119th Cong.* (2025, September 4) (Testimony of Sec. Kennedy in response to Sen. Cassidy). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6kywdBjF5o>

128 Ortiz, J.L. (2025, Sept 5). *‘Will I have access?’ As COVID cases rise, so does confusion over vaccines.* *USA Today.* <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2025/09/05/covid-vaccine-access-confusion-concern-rfk/85839600007>

129 Edwards, E., Kane, J, Gosk, S., et. al. (September 18, 2025). *Data investigation: Childhood vaccination rates are backsliding across the U.S.* *NBC News.* <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/data-investigation-childhood-vaccination-rates-are-backsliding-us-rcna228876>

130 Blake, A. (2025, September 3). *The Florida GOP ending vaccine mandates is playing with fire.* *CNN.* <https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/03/politics/florida-gop-end-vaccine-mandates>

131 Montero, A., Sparks, G., Mulugeta, M., et. al. (2025, October 9). *Tracking Poll on Health Information and Trust: Tylenol-Autism Link and Vaccine Policies.* Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF). <https://www.kff.org/public-opinion/kff-tracking-poll-on-health-information-and-trust-tylenol-autism-link-and-vaccine-policies/>

## Rising Authorities of Public Health Information

The actions that contribute to declining trust in federal public health leadership has also created a rift between the scientific community and the federal government. Typically, HHS and its sub-departments and divisions are staffed by the top scientists, legal professionals, and community health specialists in the country. Because Sec. Kennedy has staffed leadership and key roles at HHS with friends and ideological and political allies, and fired or forced out dissenting staff for the first time, scientists have an increasingly external view at decision-making. The scientific community and professional organizations have noticeably voiced their concern and opposition towards decisions made by Sec. Kennedy's HHS due to the lack of the expected level of scientific rigor and integrity. Well respected organizations, including the American Public Health Association,<sup>132</sup> the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists,<sup>133</sup> and the American Academy of Pediatrics,<sup>134</sup> have rung the alarm on Sec. Kennedy's promotion of pseudoscience and advancement of public health advice with no trustworthy evidence to back it.

Many states have taken steps to provide their own public health guidance due to concern that information coming out of the federal government could no longer be trusted. Some states have formed coalitions to take up the mantle of providing science-based recommendations. California, Hawaii,<sup>135</sup> Washington, and Oregon created the West Coast Health Alliance,<sup>136</sup> (WCHA), and more than ten states now make up the Northeast Public Health Collaborative (NPHC).<sup>137,138</sup> These regional bodies were created to provide information and resources to individuals that would otherwise have been provided by HHS. Fifteen governors have created a Governors Public Health Alliance,<sup>139</sup> sharing information previously coordinated and disseminated by the federal government.

These groups have begun to issue recommendations and resources to make up for the lack of accurate national public health guidance. For example, in preparation for the 2025-2026 respiratory virus season, WCHA released immunization recommendations for respiratory illnesses and NPHC released COVID vaccine recommendations,<sup>140,141</sup> a role that historically belongs to HHS. After the CDC changed their webpage on autism and vaccines, WCHA issued a statement affirming that vaccines do not cause autism and expressing concern over the changes.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>132</sup> American Public Health Association (APHA). (2025, August 27). *Kennedy's attack on public health must be stopped* [Press release]. <https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/kennedy-attack-on-public-health>

<sup>133</sup> American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). (2025, September 22). *ACOG Affirms Safety and Benefits of Acetaminophen during Pregnancy* [Press release]. <https://www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2025/09/acog-affirms-safety-benefits-acetaminophen-pregnancy>

<sup>134</sup> Kressly, S.J. (2025, September 18). *AAP Continues to Support Routine Immunizations for Every Child in Every Community* [Press release]. American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2025/aap-continues-to-support-access-to-routine-immunizations-for-every-child-in-every-community/>

<sup>135</sup> Office of California Governor Gavin Newsom. (2025, September 4). *Hawaii to join West Coast Health Alliance with California, Oregon, and Washington* [Press release]. <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/09/04/hawaii-to-join-west-coast-health-alliance-with-california-oregon-and-washington/>

<sup>136</sup> Gutierrez, M., Wilner, M., & Rust, S. (2025, September 3). *California pushes back on Trump's CDC with West Coast Health Alliance* - Los Angeles Times. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2025-09-03/california-pushes-back-on-trumps-cdc-with-west-coast-health-alliance>

<sup>137</sup> Association for the Advancement of Blood & Biotherapies (AABB). (2025, September 23). *Northeast States Announce Public Health Collaborative* [Press release]. <https://www.aabb.org/news-resources/news/article/2025/09/23/northeast-states-announce-public-health-collaborative>

<sup>138</sup> New York City Department of Health. (2025, September 18). *Several Northeastern States and America's Largest City Announce the Northeast Public Health Collaborative* [Press release]. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/about/press/pr2025/announce-northeast-public-health-collaborative.page>

<sup>139</sup> GovAct. (2025, October 15). *Fifteen Governors Launch Governors Public Health Alliance to Safeguard Public Health, Strengthen Preparedness, and Coordinate Across Borders* [Press release]. <https://govactalliance.org/news/govact-pressrelease-govsforhealth-launch/>

<sup>140</sup> West Coast Health Alliance (WCHA). (2025, September 15). *Consensus WCHA 2025-2026 Respiratory Virus Season Immunization Recommendations (IMM-1481)*. Governors Offices of California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington. [https://governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-09/FILE\\_5257.pdf?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-09/FILE_5257.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

<sup>141</sup> Northeast Public Health Collaborative. (2025, September 15). *Recommendations For The 2025-2026 Covid-19 Vaccine*. Governors Offices Of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and New York City. [https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2025/09/nephc-covid-19-vaccine-consensus-recommendation-final-to-leadership-9\\_15\\_2025.pdf](https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2025/09/nephc-covid-19-vaccine-consensus-recommendation-final-to-leadership-9_15_2025.pdf)

<sup>142</sup> State of Hawaii, Department of Health. (2025, November 21). *West Coast Health Alliance Stands With Scientific Evidence: Vaccines Are Not Linked To Autism* [Press release]. <https://health.hawaii.gov/news/newsroom/west-coast-health-alliance-stands-with-scientific-evidence-vaccines-are-not-linked-to-autism/>

We anticipate this shift in public health decision-making and leadership to be more rooted at the state level than at the federal level to continue in 2026. The allied states claim to be working in partnership with many of the same organizations who have pushed back on Sec. Kennedy's pseudoscientific claims.<sup>143</sup> These alliances are intended to provide trusted public health guidance they believe is missing from the federal government,<sup>144</sup> aiming to maintain integrity in public health policy and improve communication with the public by unifying their messages across states. Secretary Kennedy's attempt to push his own political agenda and fringe conspiracy theories have required state public health systems to take on additional responsibilities once seated solely within HHS.

Other new groups not associated with state governments have also formed to fill the void in science-backed information. A group of public health experts created the Vaccine Integrity Project (VIP), which aims to provide "trusted, science-based information to empower individuals, families, communities, clinicians, and policymakers to make informed vaccine choices."<sup>145</sup> VIP is led by Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota. Organized efforts to inform the public from private organizations could present a shift in the public health profession, with private entities becoming authorities to replace the scientific authority previously possessed only by HHS.

This shift to a sectionalized approach to informing the public could present dangers that could prevent the public from getting accurate vaccine information. If states possess sole responsibility for educating their constituents, public health information across the country could vary significantly. Individuals in states with governments aligning with the federal government's guidance will still experience a deficit of accurate information and could experience disparate access to health care like immunizations. If states and private organizations take the lead on education efforts, individuals will need to obtain the skills necessary to determine what information is accurate and to make educated choices for their health.

By weakening federal vaccine guidance, Sec. Kennedy's actions have opened the door to anti-vaccine policy changes on a state level. We have already begun to see the effects of a patchwork system in Florida. Florida has announced that the state will end all vaccine mandates.<sup>146</sup> Families will no longer be required to vaccinate children who are in K-12 unless the child has had a history of certain diseases. This means that many children could be at risk of contracting deadly, vaccine-preventable diseases, including those that have historically been eradicated due to decades of vaccine uptake. Florida's policy change has already resulted in confusion and concerns that it could lead to resurgences of these diseases.<sup>147</sup> Additionally, experts have cautioned that "diverging state and federal guidance could broadly undermine trust in vaccines and public health institutions and leave parents unsure about which guidance to follow."<sup>148</sup>

Current rates of infectious disease illustrate the dangers of rhetoric that promotes vaccine skepticism. Measles was considered eliminated in the U.S. in 2000,<sup>149</sup> but the U.S. has seen over 1,500 confirmed cases in 2025,<sup>150,151</sup> accounting

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143 Office of Washington State Governor Bob Ferguson. (2025, September 17). *Following Trump's politicization of CDC, West Coast states issue unified vaccine recommendations* [Press release]. <https://governor.wa.gov/news/2025/following-trumps-politicization-cdc-west-coast-states-issue-unified-vaccine-recommendations>

144 Michaud, J. & Kates, J. (2025, October 16). *States Are Forming "Health Alliances." Can They Make a Difference for Public Health Policy?* Kaiser Family Foundation. <https://www.kff.org/other-health/states-are-forming-health-alliances-can-they-make-a-difference-for-public-health-policy/>

145 Home. (n.d.). Vaccine Integrity Project. <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/vaccine-integrity-project>

146 Kekatos, M. (2025, September 3). Florida surgeon general says state is moving to "end all vaccine mandates." *ABC News*. [https://abcnews.go.com/Health/florida-surgeon-general-state-moving-end-vaccine-mandates/story?id=125224527&utm\\_source=ActiveCampaign&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=September%205%2C%202025%20%7C%20Vol%20%20MMXXV%20%7C%20Issue%20128&utm\\_campaign=DPN%209%205](https://abcnews.go.com/Health/florida-surgeon-general-state-moving-end-vaccine-mandates/story?id=125224527&utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=September%205%2C%202025%20%7C%20Vol%20%20MMXXV%20%7C%20Issue%20128&utm_campaign=DPN%209%205)

147 Washington, I., Yilma, H., & Luther, J. (2025a). Changing COVID-19 booster policies and Florida's decision to end vaccine mandates create confusion — The Monitor. In KFF. <https://www.kff.org/health-information-trust/changing-covid-19-booster-policies-and-floridas-decision-to-end-vaccine-mandates-create-confusion/>

148 Washington, I., Yilma, H., & Luther, J. (2025b). Changing COVID-19 booster policies and Florida's decision to end vaccine mandates create confusion — The Monitor. In KFF. <https://www.kff.org/health-information-trust/changing-covid-19-booster-policies-and-floridas-decision-to-end-vaccine-mandates-create-confusion/>

149 History of measles: Outbreaks and vaccine timeline. (n.d.). Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/history-disease-outbreaks-vaccine-timeline/measles>

150 Measles cases and outbreaks. (2026). In Measles (Rubeola). <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html>

151 Godoy, M. (2025, October 15). U.S. measles cases continue to climb, with outbreaks across the country. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/12/nx-s1-5572507/us-measles-outbreaks-texas-south-carolina-utah-minnesota>

for “the highest annual number in more than three decades.”<sup>152</sup> Experts are concerned the U.S. may lose its measles elimination status.<sup>153</sup> There were 45 measles outbreaks across the country in 2025,<sup>154</sup> including in Texas,<sup>155</sup> Arizona,<sup>156</sup> Missouri,<sup>157</sup> Utah,<sup>158</sup> and South Carolina.<sup>159</sup> Throughout the outbreak,<sup>160</sup> Sec. Kennedy downplayed the risk of the disease.<sup>161</sup> Pertussis, or “whooping cough” cases have also risen, including in Louisiana and Texas.<sup>162,163</sup> Other HHS actions like closing a network of centers dedicated to pandemic preparedness threaten public health in the nation as a whole as individuals choose to not get vaccinated against decades of accurate guidelines to do so,<sup>164</sup> demonstrating that Sec. Kennedy’s plan to mislead the American public is succeeding.

## Impacts on the Disability & Autistic Community

Public health initiatives and interventions are often responded to with skepticism. Fears about injury and disability are powerful enough to reanimate previously settled scientific truths, causing people to take extreme measures in misguided attempts to try and keep themselves and their families safe. From eugenicist sterilization,<sup>165</sup> to “ugly laws,”<sup>166</sup> and to forced institutionalization,<sup>167</sup> the U.S. government has a history of promoting those fears and actively engaging in ableist policy that dehumanizes people with disabilities. Within and outside of the federal government, the concept of disability has been frequently used by bad actors to deter the public away from science-backed practices, and instead move toward pseudoscience and paranoia. Autistic people have long experienced dehumanization and ableist treatment within the context of health and wellness conversations, often at the expense of their self-determination and independence.

As discussed in the background section, the MAHA movement originates with the modern anti-vaccine movement, which in turn is built around the belief that vaccines cause autism. When Sec. Kennedy has disseminated misinformation about public health and vaccines, it is often presented in connection with disability. Sec. Kennedy has repeatedly expressed that the administration is committed to finding the root causes of autism, using language

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152 Godoy, M. (2025a, July 9). U.S. measles cases hit highest level in 33 years, CDC reports. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/07/09/nx-s1-5461155/measles-outbreak-cdc-vaccination-health>

153 Michaud, J. (2025). Measles elimination status: What it is and how the U.S. could lose it. In KFF. <https://www.kff.org/other-health/measles-elimination-status-what-it-is-and-how-the-u-s-could-lose-it/#:~:text=Measles%20has%20been%20officially%20%E2%80%9Celiminated,in%20any%20year%20since%201992.>

154 Measles cases and outbreaks. (2026). In Measles (Rubeola). <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html>

155 Texas announces end of West Texas measles outbreak | Texas DSHS. (n.d.-b). [Press release]. <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/news-alerts/texas-announces-end-west-texas-measles-outbreak>

156 Measles cases surge in two counties along Utah-Arizona border. (2025, October 22). NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/measles-spreading-utah-arizona-outbreak-vaccines-rcna238757>

157 Kansas City officials report possible measles exposure at KCI. What to know. (2025, November 14). The Star. <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article312920874.html>

158 Ksl, L. S. (2025, November 14). Salt Lake County confirms its first case of measles amid nationwide outbreak. KSL.com. <https://www.ksl.com/article/5140526/salt-lake-county-confirms-its-first-case-of-measles-amid-nationwide-outbreak>

159 Snipes, A. (2025, November 14). Nearly 20 people in quarantine as another measles case reported in Upstate outbreak. <https://www.foxcarolina.com>. <https://www.foxcarolina.com/2025/11/14/nearly-20-people-quarantine-another-measles-case-reported-upstate-outbreak/>

160 Mosbergen, D. (2025, August 25). What We’ve Learned from the Texas Measles Outbreak. TIME. <https://time.com/7311758/texas-measles-outbreak-lessons/>

161 A Dr. Siegel Interview with RFK Jr. (n.d.). [Video]. Watch a Dr. Siegel Interview With Rfk Jr.: A Dr. Siegel Interview With RFK Jr. Online - Fox Nation. <https://nation.foxnews.com/watch/d5c0ee929861616db083854daa058a56/>

162 Westwood, R. (2025, October 28). Louisiana officials waited months to warn public of whooping cough outbreak. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/10/28/nx-s1-5576494/louisiana-whooping-cough-pertussis-infant-deaths>

163 Simpson, S., Keemahill, D., Simpson, S., & Keemahill, D. (2025, November 11). The number of whooping cough cases in Texas is the highest it’s been in 11 years. The Texas Tribune. <https://www.texastribune.org/2025/11/11/texas-pertussis-whooping-cough-disease-infectious/>

164 Kaiser, J. (2025, June 9). NIH terminates network aimed at stopping pandemics before they start. Science. <https://www.science.org/content/article/nih-terminates-network-aimed-stopping-pandemics-they-start>

165 Eugenics. (n.d.). National Museum of American History. <https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/everybody/citizens/eugenics>

166 Hawthorn, A. (2024, August 9). Illegal to be ‘ugly’? The history behind one of America’s cruelest laws. History. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/history-of-ugly-laws-america-disability>

167 DeLano, A. J. (2023, October 25). A History of Institutions for People with Disabilities: Neglect, Abuse, and Death – UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog. UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog. <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2023/10/25/a-history-of-institutions-for-people-with-disabilities-neglect-abuse-and-death/>

historically associated with public health epidemics or emergencies. This heightened language has broadly affected people in the disability community, who often feel that the administration's rhetoric is demeaning and dehumanizing.<sup>168</sup> Sec. Kennedy's statements about how autism destroys families, ruins lives, and invites tragedy are similarly stigmatizing and degrading.<sup>169</sup> When Sec. Kennedy announced the NIH autism registry initiative, leading disability organizations began to see an immediate reaction from their communities. Hundreds of parents and caregivers canceled diagnostic evaluations,<sup>170</sup> saying they were fearful that an autism diagnosis could lead to their child or family member ending up on the registry or their private data being shared. Autism community members have expressed that these initiatives would require "greater transparency, particularly regarding data use, consent processes, ethical oversight" and are concerned that the registry would prop up harmful or unfounded research. Even after HHS officials walked back the original registry initiative, advocates continued to voice concerns that the intent to use personal data in order to perpetuate unfounded theories or push experimental treatments without involvement and leadership from the autism community itself would be unethical and ableist. It is unclear if and how the Real World Data Platform is substantively different from the registry initiative beyond the word of NIH to follow privacy laws.

Sec. Kennedy's harmful statements about autistic people, coupled with his rejection of the scientific evidence available regarding autism and genetics, belies a false understanding of autism. His focus on the causes of autism has meant vital government resources—such as services, supports, and resources that autistic people and their families rely on—have been shifted toward researching the link between vaccines and autism and other fringe theories about autism causation.<sup>171</sup> The CDC's newly adopted priorities include a commitment to finding the causes of autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities, which are both described as "epidemics" in their prevalence and categorized as "chronic illnesses."<sup>172</sup> This language ignores the fundamental truth that autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability, not a chronic illness; an offensive assertion to many. It also ignores that autism prevalence has increased largely due to advancements in diagnostic criteria, screening services, and awareness.

## Systemic Actions and Broad Themes

Sec. Kennedy's policy agenda for vaccines and autism exist in a broader context created by the actions of the federal government that impacted and continue to impact disabled people. Policies from Congress and the administration that cut funding for Medicaid threaten access to supports and services for millions of people with disabilities, including autistic individuals. Consistent RIFs at HHS caused confusion and chaos as the agency lost staff with years of expertise in disability systems and the skills to improve them. Proposals to reorganize the Administration for Community Living (ACL), which is housed in HHS, would devastate the broad swath of people with disabilities who rely on ACL to ensure they can live in the community and meaningfully participate in society. While not fully eliminated, ACL staff was cut in half by one of the many RIFs. Staffing changes at the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Office of Head Start and Office of Refugee Resettlement will affect foster youth with disabilities. Eliminating or shrinking the responsibilities of the Department of Education, especially the Offices of Civil Rights and Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, also have an outsized impact on students with disabilities. These actions simply make it harder to be autistic, or disabled in any way, in America.

While not arising to the scope of the review, HHS' targeting of the disability community through discussion on the harms of fluoride in drinking water and food dyes is worth providing some more detail on. HHS's recommendation to states to remove fluoride from drinking water with the claim that it causes "neurodevelopmental disorders" is focused

<sup>168</sup> Rogin, A., & Norris, C. (2025, May 15). How RFK Jr. is shaping the conversation about autism and why advocates are pushing back. *PBS News*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-rfk-jr-is-shaping-the-conversation-about-autism-and-why-advocates-are-pushing-back>

<sup>169</sup> HHS Secretary Kennedy to Hold Press Conference on Latest CDC Data Showing Alarming Increase of Autism Epidemic. (2025, April 15). [Press release]. <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-secretary-kennedy-press-conference-cdc-data-autism-epidemic.html>

<sup>170</sup> Tin, A. (2025, April 25). Health agencies "not creating an autism registry," official says, contradicting NIH director. *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/health-agencies-not-creating-autism-registry-hhs-nih/>

<sup>171</sup> Lerner, S. (2025, August 20). RFK Jr. vowed to find the environmental causes of autism. Then he shut down research trying to do just that. *ProPublica*. <https://www.propublica.org/article/rfk-jr-autism-environment-research-funding#:~:text=Kennedy%20has%20also%20overseen%20tens,blame%20the%20condition%20on%20vaccines.%20%E2%80%9C>

<sup>172</sup> CDC priorities. (2025, September 17). About CDC. <https://cdc.gov/about/cdc/index.html>

on intellectual disabilities broadly,<sup>173</sup> and demonstrates a continued scapegoating of the community. They additionally invoked disability as a reason to reduce the use of food dye, claiming that food dye led to various conditions such as diabetes, obesity, depression, and ADHD.<sup>174</sup> The MAHA Report also claimed autism may be linked to food dye exposure; however, the administration's messaging on food dyes has primarily focused on other disabilities since then. The use of various disabilities as factors intended to cause fear among parents epitomizes Kennedy's strategy to move the public opinion towards conspiracy theories and away from scientific reality.

## Strengths and Limitations

This report centralizes HHS' actions and its leadership's communications related to autism and vaccines during the first year of the second Trump administration. The timeline and contents of this report are vital to understanding how this HHS operates. It also serves as a record of these actions as public health resources and agency communications are altered or deleted entirely. Future administrations committed to scientific integrity and the dignity of disabled people could use this report to address inaccurate and harmful actions taken throughout the Trump administration.

This report is limited to the first year of the second Trump administration and focuses on a narrow sliver of HHS's actions in particular. The timeline is not a comprehensive collection of all of the misinformation or actions shared or taken by the administration or HHS. It is also possible it is not a complete collection of all actions taken by HHS related to autism or vaccines, due to the constraints of our media review and methodology. Sources or communications may have been deleted or not covered by our searches and some actions may still be concealed from the public. The one year scope also narrowly cuts off relevant actions that continue to occur through the publication period of the report; notably the appointment of the full slate of IACC appointees. We believe that this is the most comprehensive timeline that could be produced with the resources at our disposal.

## Moving Forward

Under Sec. Kennedy, HHS has elevated pseudoscientific theories, peddled vaccine and overall public health disinformation, eschewed science-based public health guidance, undermined vaccine safety, and further marginalized people with disabilities. The Secretary's playbook has resulted in a demonstrable success at implementing his policy goals. It has mixed success in the realm of public opinion, as it has successfully introduced vaccine hesitancy as a topic of publicly acceptable debate, but has destroyed public trust in Kennedy and the department he oversees. The disability community has consistently warned the general public that these actions threaten the progress we have fought to achieve, including the significant increase in community living and the improvements in accessibility and inclusion. Health experts also caution that changes to vaccine policy and public health guidance threaten the progress the country has made in eradicating some infectious diseases and keeping the public safe. To mitigate the impacts of HHS policies today and reverse the effects tomorrow, action is needed at multiple levels of government.

## Policy Recommendations

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The past year's shifts in public health policy elicited strong reactions from the public and institutions. As evidenced by the polling cited in this report, the country is facing a crisis of public trust. Changes spearheaded by Secretary Kennedy to HHS, CDC, FDA, ACIP, NIH, and CMS ensure that the role of scientific integrity in federal decision-making is greatly diminished. The public continues to be endangered by these policy actions and the lack of accountability from top health officials. We put forth these recommendations based on our review of the past year with the goal of building trust in accurate sources of public health and scientific information, rebuilding and renewing fractured institutions at the

<sup>173</sup> Kennedy, Jr., R. F. [@RobertKennedyJr]. (2024, November 2). *On January 20, the Trump White House will advise all U.S. water systems to remove fluoride from public water. Fluoride is an industrial waste associated with arthritis, bone fractures, bone cancer, IQ loss, neurodevelopmental disorders, and thyroid disease. President @realDonaldTrump and First Lady @MELANIATRUMP want to Make America Healthy Again. @michaelpconnett.* X. <https://x.com/RobertKennedyJr/status/1852812012478398923?s=20>

<sup>174</sup> Office of the Commissioner. (2025, April 22). HHS, FDA to phase out Petroleum-Based synthetic dyes in nation's food supply [Press release]. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/hhs-fda-phase-out-petroleum-based-synthetic-dyes-nations-food-supply>

federal level, and holding HHS accountable for the harm it inflicts on marginalized communities.

The following recommendations were developed to reach a broad audience, demonstrating the breadth of work that it will take to undo the impacts of an HHS under Secretary Kennedy's leadership. The recommendations provide information for federal and state-level policymakers and advocates for disability rights and public health. We also identify areas of future research.

## **Federal Policy Recommendations**

### **Legislative Recommendations**

The United States government is led by three co-equal branches of government. The actions taken by HHS do not exist in a vacuum. The legislative branch plays a fundamental role in the oversight of the actions of the executive branch. In response to the most recent actions taken by HHS and its constituent agencies and federal bodies, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee should bring Sec. Kennedy and other related HHS officials to testify in an oversight hearing. Issues in need of oversight include, the September 22<sup>nd</sup> White House Press Conference on acetaminophen use, the November 19<sup>th</sup> modification to the CDC autism and vaccines webpage, the removal of warnings for dangerous autism "treatments" from an FDA webpage, the reformation of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee, and the unilateral modification of the Childhood Vaccine Schedule by Secretary Kennedy. It is in the public's best interest to know more about the process behind these decisions. We recommend the HELP Committee require testimony to be provided under oath and for the Committee to exert pressure on HHS to disseminate accurate public health information to correct previous communications. If Sec. Kennedy provides responses to the inquiries indicating corruption, dereliction of duty, or extreme bias; obstructs the inquiries of the Committee; or lies to the Committee under oath, impeachment and removal proceedings should be taken up against the Secretary and he should be replaced by an officer faithful to the duties of the position as is precedent.

There has been bipartisan discussion and interest in establishing guardrails to ensure annual appropriations are appropriately utilized and the agencies of the executive branch fulfill their statutory duties.<sup>175</sup> We support these efforts and believe they should go further. Guardrails must improve the current state of checks and balances within executive departments and federal agencies. Systems should be redesigned to never allow political appointees to destroy agencies from the inside out. This could help ensure that HHS funding for autism research, vaccines, or other public health measures are invested in good faith towards furthering scientific understanding and health. Guardrails would also need to address the level of independence the Department of Justice (DoJ) has from the presidency and the rest of the executive branch. Violations of federal law by the federal government should be met with swift and just enforcement, that is only possible with an independent DoJ.

The Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support (CARES) Act is the primary law focused on autism research. The most recent reauthorization of the Autism CARES Act was signed into law in December of 2024. There are several important pieces of implementation the administration has thus far neglected. Most importantly, the research priorities funded by the Autism CARES Act need to align with the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) strategic plan as required by law. We call upon HHS and NIH to follow the most recent IACC strategic plan at time of publication of this report. For example, funding must continue to support the work of Autism Centers of Excellence as well as initiatives taken on by the Health Resource Services Administration. There is a specific need for research focused on supporting autistic people throughout the lifespan, improving services and supports, addressing communication needs, and improving care for and scientific understanding of co-occurring conditions. The Leadership Education and Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program is also funded through the Autism CARES Act. It is vital funding continues for this program that trains leaders on how to develop and improve systems of care and support for people with neurodevelopmental disabilities, including autism. The Autism CARES Act of 2024 also included a new provision calling on the NIH to provide a budget estimate for the initiatives of the National Institutes of Health pursuant to the IACC's strategic plan. As of the release of this report, NIH has not produced a budget estimate for fiscal year 2026. This information is critical to understanding how Autism CARES research dollars are being spent and awarded by NIH,

<sup>175</sup> Hulse, C. (2025, August 20). Senate Adds Guardrails in an Effort to Force Trump to Obey Spending Bills. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/20/us/politics/senate-spending-guardrails-trump.html>

and if the funded studies and projects are in line with scientific and community consensus that produced the most recently published IACC strategic plan. The materials produced for the 2024 update to the IACC strategic plan focused on co-occurring conditions need to be published as promised by the previous iteration of the IACC, and the work produced by the previous committee should be incorporated into current strategic planning efforts.

The largest Medicaid cuts in history were passed into law in 2025 with the passage of H.R. 1 of the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress. A significant percentage of autistic people, and people with disabilities broadly, receive health care through Medicaid. The biggest impact these cuts will have on autistic people are expected cuts to Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). It is optional for states to provide HCBS through Medicaid. When there are state budget shortfalls, optional services like HCBS are the first to be cut. Congress should take up and pass the HCBS Access Act in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress. This bill would require Medicaid to cover HCBS, ending the institutional bias, alongside several other major improvements. Additionally, there should be an introduction and passage of legislation to raise the Medicaid Asset limit to match and grow with inflation.

## Agency Recommendations

Federal agencies are historically staffed by individuals who dedicate their careers to civil service. Federal officials take oaths in service of the American people, regardless of the political party of the President. The Trump administration, including HHS, has made significant efforts to dismantle this norm as demonstrated by the timeline. Within HHS, several key divisions support individuals with disabilities and provide essential services. For example, the ACL is a central hub for all things disability and aging. This evidence of progress was created by years of advocacy from the disability and aging communities to get the federal government to prioritize independence, empowerment, and living in the community whenever possible. Firing half of ACL's staff and proposing a complete dismantling of this agency demonstrates a clear lack of respect for people with disabilities and older adults from the administration. It also endangers timely distribution of hundreds of millions of dollars in HCBS grant funding and the operating budgets for the Developmental Disabilities Act programs.

Many of the agencies overseen by HHS that serve disabled individuals were hit hard by RIFs. Staff who ensured grants are distributed organizations that provide disability services and investigate civil rights abuses were all affected by the RIFs. To move past this destruction, these RIFs should be reversed and future HHS political appointees must commit to maintaining and rebuilding the institutions that serve disabled people.

It is also essential that agencies such as HHS ensure that they are following statutory requirements established by Congress when the agencies were created. Much of what we have seen from Sec. Kennedy has been outside of HHS's statutory authority, demonstrating a clear lack of respect for Congress as well as the broader structure of federal agencies. Maintaining internal compliance policies and procedures that enforce statutory requirements and other federal laws is essential to fulfilling the goals of HHS. This includes issuing Notices of Funding Opportunities and grant awards in a timely manner and not rescinding grants abruptly based on alleged misalignment with the administration's priorities or perceived vengeance.<sup>176</sup>

Within HHS, CMS has been tasked with implementation of the Medicaid-related portions of H.R. 1 throughout 2026. The full impact of H.R. 1 on autistic people who use Medicaid is unknown as CMS prepares guidance on which populations and eligibility pathways are not affected by work reporting requirements. That said, the impact on the broader support network for autistic people, like family caregivers, is expected to be immense. CMS should adopt caregiver, medically frail, and complex medical conditions exemptions for community engagement requirements in line with the advocacy of the disability community.<sup>177</sup>

## State Level Policy Recommendations

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<sup>176</sup> Yang, M. (2025, December 18). American Academy of Pediatrics loses government funding after criticizing RFK Jr. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/dec/17/american-academy-pediatrics-funding-rfk>

<sup>177</sup> Justice in Aging, Bazelon Center, & National Health Law Program. (2025). Recommendations for Mitigating Harms to People with Disabilities, Older Adults, and Caregivers from Medicaid Work Requirements. [https://justiceinaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/NHeLP\\_JIA\\_Bazelon\\_RecsforMitigatingHarmstoPWD\\_OlderAdults\\_WorkReq\\_122025.pdf](https://justiceinaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/NHeLP_JIA_Bazelon_RecsforMitigatingHarmstoPWD_OlderAdults_WorkReq_122025.pdf)

State governments need to provide accurate public health information and take on additional public health responsibilities wherever and whenever HHS neglects its responsibilities. HHS historically provided states with accurate information and guidance to implement vaccine recommendations. In this absence, states should continue to form and build upon existing vaccine alliances that ensure uninterrupted access to vaccines and vaccine education. Vaccine education efforts need to be robust and earnest to counter the misinformation propagated by Sec. Kennedy and HHS. Accessibility is and will continue to be a common issue. For example, vaccine education materials should be in accessible formats and written in plain language to ensure disabled people are included in efforts to regain control of the public health narrative. Evaluations should be conducted to guarantee education initiatives are effective and reach the necessary audiences to mitigate spread of infectious disease and mortality.

With HHS unable or unwilling to provide assistance to states, arbitrarily cancelling research grants, and experiencing bottlenecks and inefficiencies due to constant shifting in departmental personnel, it is more important than ever for states to maintain their state level public health infrastructure. Many states have programs in place to support individuals with disabilities and continue the work that happens within HHS. States must work to ensure that their systems are adequately staffed and adequately funded and are able to provide services their constituents need.

Many states rely on funding from HHS to provide services to individuals with disabilities and operate programs. Without funding from HHS or with the risk of awards being delayed, states will need to become more creative to minimize disruption. State legislators and agency officials should meet with disabled constituents to best understand what needs are not being fulfilled due to the changes at HHS and what can be done instead at the state level. Per the 2024 rule from HHS prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, state and local governments that receive federal funding from HHS must make any programs or resources provided on the internet or through a mobile app accessible to individuals with disabilities in the summer of 2026. States should go a step further than these requirements to write educational materials in plain language and include people with disabilities when engaging members of the public.

## **Recommendations for Advocates**

Advocates looking to support people with disabilities have repeatedly expressed being overwhelmed by this administration's actions.<sup>178</sup> Advocates should use this time to engage their local communities, build support networks, and provide education for each other and their greater community. This is the most important action individuals can take to address systemic forces, administrative overreach, and growing societal distrust.

As established by this report, Sec. Kennedy has abused his position to spread false and biased information and scapegoat multiple communities, especially autistic people. He regularly violates institutional norms and breaks the promises he made in his confirmation hearings. Advocates should reach out to their members of Congress to express their frustrations about Sec. Kennedy and HHS leadership and inform their members of Congress of the tangible impacts HHS's actions have on them. Legislators need to hear about the failings of HHS and the very real consequences of Sec. Kennedy's actions. It is also important to contact state legislators, state health department officials, and the respective governor to urge them to fill in for the failings of HHS.<sup>179</sup>

The trend of multi-state alliances, professional organizations, and newly formed community organizations providing public health information is likely to continue. We may also see a similar trend of MAHA-aligned organizations attempting to counter these efforts in an increasingly decentralized information ecosystem. Vaccinations are life-saving and having accurate information about the correct vaccination schedule is essential to protect yourself and your family. Exercise caution and high scrutiny when evaluating public health advice and rely on good scientific evidence when making decisions. We recommend the American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the American Academy of Family Physicians for information related to vaccine schedules.

Advocates may benefit from reading the plain language version of this report, which is accessible to a broader audience and emphasizes the portions of this report most valuable to a disability-focused audience.

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<sup>178</sup> In this report, we are using the term "advocates" to include self-advocates as well as allies of disabled people.

<sup>179</sup> Note that this is very dependent on what state and even locality you live in. Some state governments might be aligned with HHS. Use your personal judgement to complete a risk assessment before conducting outreach.

## Recommendations for Further Research

The scope of this report is centered on the actions this administration has taken related to public health, autism, and vaccines. There are several ways to build on the efforts of this report. The first dimension is the population of interest. There were major events taken by the administration or Congress that had a large impact on the disability community that did not fit within the report's scope of analysis. Future researchers could conduct the same analysis primarily examining HHS's actions, but not just how they affect autistic people. Researchers could focus on actions affecting the entire disability community or even other marginalized groups. Another dimension is the subject matter. This report chose to prioritize looking at autism in relation to public health due to Sec. Kennedy's fixation on autism and the administration's effort to medicalize it. There is a need to perform a similar analysis across other departments such as Education, Justice, Housing and Urban Development, and more. Ideally these analyses would include Congressional and judicial actions as well. The third dimension is the time period. This report only covers events in the first year of the second Trump administration. Replicating the efforts of this report for the next three years would be useful. Any combination of these expansions would build an even more comprehensive record for posterity and would be a worthwhile endeavor.

## Methodology

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This report cites official statements from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). An initial digital search consisted of the Department's public statements including HHS press releases, fact sheets, and other digital communication concerning actions that could impact the autistic community. Additional searches for the same actions and events included White House press releases, fact sheets, memos, and presidential actions,; and the social media accounts of HHS, NIH, CMS, FDA, CDC, HRSA and the accounts of their leadership.

Additional queries were conducted with Google News, using key terms listed in Table 1. Entries that include search terms in open and closed brackets such as, "[HHS]/[NIH] Communications Freeze" denote that the queries "HHS Communication Freeze" and "NIH Communication Freeze" were both conducted. News articles were selected for further review if they were accredited, written within one week after the event occurred, directly addressed the event under consideration, and were listed at the time as 'most relevant' within the search engine. Consulted articles were published by *The Washington Post*, *NPR*, *Politico*, *Wall Street Journal*, *MSN*, *AP News*, *The Guardian*, *CBS News*, *ABC News*, *Reuters*, *Health Care Finance News*, *Stat News*, *Ars Technica*, *PBS News*, *Inside Higher Education*, *BBC*, *NBC News*, *Higher Ed Dive*, *WIRED*, *The Hill*, and *Fox News*. The inclusion period for timeline entries and timeline source material is January 20th, 2025 through January 20th, 2026.

Table 1: Google Searches Conducted			
HHS	RFK Jr.	MAHA	RFK MAHA
[HHS]/[FDA]/[CDC]/[NIH]/[CMS] Autism	HHS RIFs	HHS RFK new hire	[HHS]/[FDA]/[CDC]/[NIH]/[CMS] resignation
[HHS]/[NIH] Communications Freeze	RFK Confirmation Hearing Responses	RFK statements	HHS DOGE
MAHA Report	MAHA Strategy	ADDM Report	Autism Data Science Initiative
ACIP Meeting	HHS / [CDC]/[FDA]/[NIH]/[CMS]	HHS Press Releases	[HHS]/[CDC]/[NIH]/[FDA] Vaccine
Autism vaccines HHS	Autism Misinformation	Autism acetaminophen HHS	IACC autism

The timeline is limited to events that directly impacted the autistic community, with a particular focus on events that furthered the administration’s autism and vaccine-related priorities. What constitutes “directly impacting” the autistic community was not always an easy judgment to make. The authors generally consider this to mean that autism or the autistic community were the primary focus or party affected by an event. The inclusion criteria also accounts for personnel and capacity changes within HHS that altered its operations related to autism and vaccines.

As a result, this timeline is not a comprehensive summary of all of HHS’s actions and communications in the first year of the administration. For example, several highly impactful and highly advertised actions regarding reproductive health, nutrition, and prescription drug costs were excluded from the timeline. Even though these topics can and do impact autistic people, they are beyond the scope of the report. As the report is focused on the administration’s actions, and primarily HHS, actions that are solely legislative were not included in the timeline. Notable statements from elected public officials were included.

After careful consideration, the authors of the report determined actions related to fluoride and food dye would not be included in the timeline. While HHS has cited some studies that investigated associations between exposures to fluoride or food dye and autism, evaluation of HHS and HHS officials’ communication demonstrated that neither topic is part of the administration’s regular communication or policy actions concerning autism.

The timeline references various public statements in order to understand the context of and reaction to the included events. The statements were investigated based on two characteristics of the publishing organization:

1. Autism/Disability Rights Organizations:
  - a. Autism Society of America
  - b. Autistic Self Advocacy Network
  - c. Association of University Centers on Disabilities
  - d. Autistic People of Color Fund
  - e. Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network

- f. American Association of People with Disabilities
  - g. The Arc
  - h. National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
2. Prominent research and professional organizations:
- a. American Association of Pediatrics
  - b. American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology
  - c. American Public Health Association

## Conclusion

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The Department of Health and Human Services's mission is to "enhance the health and well-being of all Americans, by providing for effective health and human services and by fostering sound, sustained advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social services."<sup>180</sup> HHS has failed to abide by this mission under Secretary Kennedy's stewardship. The administration is failing the American public as it continues to push narratives based on debunked conspiracy theories, paranoia, and othering. This administration continues to target autistic people instead of providing essential services with dignity. Policymakers at all levels of government need to protect their constituents and combat Sec. Kennedy's playbook to spread misinformation and dismantle our public health system. The threat of disease spread, service collapse, and institutionalization is too high.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Event	Sources
January 20, 2025	Inauguration. Donald J. Trump begins his second term as the 47th President of the United States.	Associated Press. (2025, January 20). Live updates: Donald Trump's 2025 Inauguration Day. PBS News. <a href="https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/live-updates-donald-trumps-2025-inauguration-day">https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/live-updates-donald-trumps-2025-inauguration-day</a>
January 22, 2025	<p>HHS initiates a Communication Freeze, meaning that everyone in the Department is prohibited from issuing documents, guidance, or most forms of communication with the public.</p> <p>The hold is intended to end February 1 to give time for a Presidential appointee to be confirmed.</p>	Emanuel, G. (2025, January 22). Federal health agencies were told to halt all external communications. National Public Radio (NPR). <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/22/nx-s1-5270866/hhs-cdc-health-communications-trump">https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/22/nx-s1-5270866/hhs-cdc-health-communications-trump</a>
January 29–30, 2025	U.S. Senate holds confirmation hearings for Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.	<p><i>U.S. Senate Committee on Finance's hearing to consider the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, 119th Congress.</i> (2025).</p> <p><a href="https://www.finance.senate.gov/hearings/hearingto-consider-the-nomination-of-robert-f-kennedy-jr-of-california-to-be-secretary-of-health-and-human-services">https://www.finance.senate.gov/hearings/hearingto-consider-the-nomination-of-robert-f-kennedy-jr-of-california-to-be-secretary-of-health-and-human-services</a></p>
January 27-29, 2025	The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a memo freezing all spending on grants and loans government-wide, impacting HHS grants. This results in a disruption of state Medicaid reimbursement portals in all 50 states.	Stein, J., Bogage, J., & Davies, E. (2025, January 28). White House pauses all federal grants, sparking confusion. Washington Post. <a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/01/27/white-house-pauses-federal-grants/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/01/27/white-house-pauses-federal-grants/</a>
February 1, 2025	The communications freeze issued on January 21, 2025 is supposed to end this day, but communication with the agency remains paused.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, January 21). <i>Immediate Pause on Issuing Documents and Public Communications ~ ACTION</i> (to Heads of Operating Divisions & Heads of Staff Divisions). Dorothy A. Fink, MD, Acting Secretary. <a href="https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25502931-acting-hhs-secretary-communications-memo-1-21-25/">https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25502931-acting-hhs-secretary-communications-memo-1-21-25/</a>

February 6, 2025	A group of 34 Senators, led by Senator Amy Klobuchar and Senator Bernie Sanders, call on HHS to end the communications freeze in a letter to the Acting Secretary of Health and Human Services, Dorothy Fink.	Klobuchar, & Sanders. (2025, February 6). Klobuchar, Sanders, colleagues call on administration to end harmful freeze on health communications and funding [Press release]. U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar. <a href="https://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2025/2/klobuchar-sanders-colleagues-call-on-administration-to-end-harmful-freeze-on-health-communications-and-funding">https://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2025/2/klobuchar-sanders-colleagues-call-on-administration-to-end-harmful-freeze-on-health-communications-and-funding</a>
February 7, 2025	The National Institute of Health (NIH) caps indirect costs for universities at 15% for research, representing as much as a 75% reduction of funding for some.	Unglesbee, B. (2025, February 11). 'Self-inflicted wound': Widespread alarm as Trump administration slashes NIH funding. <i>Higher Ed Dive</i> . <a href="https://www.highereddive.com/news/nih-indirect-cost-rate-cap-funding-cut-ags-lawsuit/739735/">https://www.highereddive.com/news/nih-indirect-cost-rate-cap-funding-cut-ags-lawsuit/739735/</a>
February 10, 2025	William Stuart Burns becomes a Senior Adviser at the CDC.	LegiStorm. <i>Stuart Burns Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Feb. 2025-), Senior Adviser to the Director</i> . (n.d.). Retrieved January 26, 2026, from <a href="https://www.legistorm.com/person/bio/18389/William_Stuart_Burns.html">https://www.legistorm.com/person/bio/18389/William_Stuart_Burns.html</a>
February 13, 2025	The Senate votes to confirm RFK Jr. as Secretary of HHS. He was confirmed with 52 Senators voting for him and 48 voting against him.	U.S. Senate Roll Call Votes, Confirmation: Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services), 119th Congress, 1st Session, Nomination #PN11-8 (2025, February 13). <a href="https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_votes/vote1191/vote_119_1_00052.htm">https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_votes/vote1191/vote_119_1_00052.htm</a>
February 13, 2025	The White House releases the "Establishing the President's Make America Healthy Again Commission" (MAHA) Executive Order.  The order establishes RFK Jr. as the chair of the commission. The order establishes RFK Jr. as the chair of the commission.	Office of the U.S. White House. (2025, February 13). Establishing The President's <i>Make America Healthy Again Commission</i> . Presidential Actions. <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/establishing-the-presidents-make-america-healthy-again-commission/">https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/establishing-the-presidents-make-america-healthy-again-commission/</a>

February 16, 2025	HHS fires employees, citing Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) efforts and their status as probationary employees. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) were some of the HHS agencies hit hardest.	Messerly, M., & Lim, D. (2025, February 16). Mass firings continue across nation's health agencies. <i>Politico</i> . <a href="https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/16/mass-firings-health-agencies-00204570">https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/16/mass-firings-health-agencies-00204570</a>
February 20, 2025	RFK Jr. postpones a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).  The committee makes recommendations to the Director of the CDC regarding vaccines.	Levine, D., & Singh, P. (2025, February 20). US vaccine advisory meeting postponed after Kennedy takes top health job. <i>Reuters</i> . <a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-cdc-vaccine-advisory-meeting-be-postponed-stat-news-reports-2025-02-20/">https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-cdc-vaccine-advisory-meeting-be-postponed-stat-news-reports-2025-02-20/</a>
February 28, 2025	HHS issues notice rescinding the Richardson Waiver. This action reduces public impact and democratic participation in rulemaking.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Richardson Waiver required notice and comment periods for regulations relating to Medicare and Medicaid</li> </ul>	Mys, A. (2025, March 18). <i>HHS Rescinds Richardson Waiver, Reducing Public Input in Rulemaking</i> . American Bar Association. <a href="https://www.americanbar.org/groups/health_law/news/2025/3/hhs-rescinds-richardson-waiver-reducing-public-input-in-rulemaking/">https://www.americanbar.org/groups/health_law/news/2025/3/hhs-rescinds-richardson-waiver-reducing-public-input-in-rulemaking/</a>
March 2, 2025	Measles outbreak is reported in Texas. Cases started in January.  RFK Jr. publishes an op-ed stating that getting vaccines is an individual choice despite research supporting the measles vaccine.	HHS Sec. Kennedy, R.F. (2025, March 2). Measles outbreak is call to action for all of us. <i>Fox News</i> . <a href="https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/robert-f-kennedy-jr-measles-outbreak-call-action-all-us">https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/robert-f-kennedy-jr-measles-outbreak-call-action-all-us</a>
March 24, 2025	RFK Jr. nominates Susan Monarez as the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) She would be the first CDC Director who is not a medical doctor in more than 70 years.	U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, Nomination: Susan Monarez, of Wisconsin, to be Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 119th Congress, 1st Session, Nomination #PN60-14 (2025, March 31). <a href="https://www.congress.gov/nomination/119th-congress/60/14">https://www.congress.gov/nomination/119th-congress/60/14</a>
March 24, 2025	HHS announces that it plans to close the office focused on Long COVID research.	Gardner, S., & Ollstein, A.M. (2025, March 24). Trump administration shuttering Long Covid office. <i>Politico</i> . <a href="https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/24/trump-administration-shuttering-office-of-long-covid-research-and-practice-00246836">https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/24/trump-administration-shuttering-office-of-long-covid-research-and-practice-00246836</a>

<p>March 25, 2025</p>	<p>HHS hires David Geier to research the link between immunizations and autism.</p>	<p>Sun, L.H., &amp; Nirappil, F. (2025, March 25) Vaccine skeptic hired to head federal study of immunizations and autism. <i>The Washington Post</i>. <a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/03/25/vaccine-skeptic-hhs-rfk-immunization-autism/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/03/25/vaccine-skeptic-hhs-rfk-immunization-autism/</a></p>
<p>March 26, 2025</p>	<p>HHS cancels \$11.4 billion in federal grants to state and community health departments. The grants were allocated during the COVID-19 public health emergency.</p> <p>Another grant of \$1 billion is canceled from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).</p>	<p>Zadrozny, B. (2025, March 25). CDC is pulling back \$11B in Covid funding sent to health departments across the U.S. <i>NBC News</i>. <a href="https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/cdc-pulling-back-11b-covid-funding-sent-health-departments-us-rcna198006">https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/cdc-pulling-back-11b-covid-funding-sent-health-departments-us-rcna198006</a></p> <p>Mandavilli, A., Sanger-Katz, M., &amp; and Hoffman, J. (2025, March 26). Trump Administration Abruptly Cuts Billions From State Health Services. <i>The New York Times</i>. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/26/health/trump-state-health-grants-cuts.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/26/health/trump-state-health-grants-cuts.html</a></p>
<p>March 27, 2025</p>	<p>HHS announces a restructure to be included in the President's budget request.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The request includes the reorganization of the Administration for Community Living (ACL) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), elimination of several Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) programs, and reductions-in-force at the CDC and NIH.</li> </ul>	<p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, March 27). <i>HHS Announces Transformation to Make America Healthy Again</i> [Press release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restructuring-doge.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restructuring-doge.html</a></p>
<p>March 28, 2025</p>	<p>Peter Marks, a top vaccine official at HHS, resigns stating that it is clear that RFK Jr. does not want to follow science.</p>	<p>Faguy, A. (2025, March 28). Top US vaccine official forced to resign, reports say. <i>BBC News</i>. <a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8r87z8vloo">https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8r87z8vloo</a></p>
<p>April 1, 2025</p>	<p>HHS begins sending notices of termination to many employees in various agencies within the agency.</p>	<p>Stein, R., Lupkin, S., Simmons-Duffin, S., et. al. (2025, April 1). Layoffs begin at HHS, affecting thousands of staff and leadership. <i>NPR</i>. <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/04/01/g-s1-57485/hhs-fda-layoffs-doge-cdc-nih">https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/04/01/g-s1-57485/hhs-fda-layoffs-doge-cdc-nih</a></p>

April 3, 2025	HHS closes various offices tasked with handling Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. FOIA requests are an important part of government accountability.	Johansen, B. (2025, April 3). Kennedy shuts several FOIA offices at HHS. <i>Politico</i> . <a href="https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/04/kennedy-shutters-foia-offices-hhs-00268646">https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/04/kennedy-shutters-foia-offices-hhs-00268646</a>
April 10, 2025	RFK Jr. claims in a cabinet meeting that they will “know the causes of autism” by September.	Aaron Rugar. [@atrugar.com]. (2025, April 10). RFK Jr: “By September we will know what has caused the autism epidemic and we will be able to eliminate those exposures.” [Video clip from Fox News] [Post]. BlueSky.  <a href="https://bsky.app/profile/atrugar.com/post/3lmhzzlotzb2e">https://bsky.app/profile/atrugar.com/post/3lmhzzlotzb2e</a>
April 11, 2025	NIH grant reviews resume in limited capacity, demonstrating an end to the communications pause.	Palmer, K. (2025, April 16). NIH Resumes Key Grant Review Panels. <i>Inside Higher Ed</i> . <a href="https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/science-research-policy/2025/04/16/nih-resumes-key-grant-review-panels">https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/science-research-policy/2025/04/16/nih-resumes-key-grant-review-panels</a>
April 15th, 2025	<p>The Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Report is released, and HHS holds a press conference to discuss its findings.</p> <p>It reports a prevalence estimate of 1 in 31 children having Autism at the age of 8.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, April 15). ‘Autism Epidemic Runs Rampant,’ New Data Shows 1 in 31 Children Afflicted [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/autism-epidemic-runs-rampant-new-data-shows-grants.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/autism-epidemic-runs-rampant-new-data-shows-grants.html</a></p> <p>Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. (MMWR). (2025, April 15). <i>Prevalence and Early Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 4 and 8 Years — Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 16 Sites, United States, 2022 (74(2);1–22)</i>. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).  <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/74/ss/ss7402a1.htm?s_cid=ss7402a1_w">https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/74/ss/ss7402a1.htm?s_cid=ss7402a1_w</a></p>

<p>April 16th, 2025</p>	<p>Kennedy holds a press conference where he says harmful statements about autistic community, and how it is “destroying families”</p> <p>The press conference received a lot of attention from disability rights communities and public health officials.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, April 15). <i>HHS Secretary Kennedy to Hold Press Conference on Latest CDC Data Showing Alarming Increase of Autism Epidemic</i> [Press Release].</p> <p><a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-secretary-kennedy-press-conference-cdc-data-autism-epidemic.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-secretary-kennedy-press-conference-cdc-data-autism-epidemic.html</a></p>
<p>April 21, 2025</p>	<p>Bhattacharya says in a presentation at an NIH meeting that they will be creating a registry for national diseases which would include a separate registry for autism.</p> <p>The registry would compile private medical records to give researchers more data.</p>	<p>Tin, A. (2025, April 22). RFK Jr.’s autism study to amass medical records of many Americans. <i>CBS News</i>. <a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rfk-jr-autism-study-medical-records/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rfk-jr-autism-study-medical-records/</a></p>
<p>April 25, 2025</p>	<p>HHS walks back the statement regarding a registry saying they are not creating an “autism registry.”</p> <p>This is the beginning of the branding of the “Real World Data Platform” which they say will be used to identify the root causes of autism.</p>	<p>Tin, A. (2025, April 25). Health agencies “not creating an autism registry,” official says, contradicting NIH director. <i>CBS News</i>. <a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/health-agencies-not-creating-autism-registry-hhs-nih/?intcid=CNI-00-10aaa3a">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/health-agencies-not-creating-autism-registry-hhs-nih/?intcid=CNI-00-10aaa3a</a></p>
<p>May 7, 2025</p>	<p>NIH announces partnership with CMS to share Medicare and Medicaid data with one another and build a data platform to research autism.</p>	<p>U.S. Centers for Medicare &amp; Medicaid Services (CMS). (2025, May 7). <i>NIH, CMS Partner to Advance Understanding of Autism Through Secure Access to Select Medicare and Medicaid Data</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/nih-cms-partner-advance-understanding-autism-through-secure-access-select-medicare-and-medicaid-data">https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/nih-cms-partner-advance-understanding-autism-through-secure-access-select-medicare-and-medicaid-data</a></p>
<p>May 14th, 2025</p>	<p>RFK Jr. testifies in front of the House Budget and Senate HELP hearings where he was questioned on staffing cuts, research funding freezes, and his refusal to recommend that children get vaccinated according to the vaccine schedule.</p>	<p>Seitz, A. (2025, May 14). WATCH: Secretary RFK Jr. testifies on staffing cuts, funding freezes and HHS policy changes. <i>PBS News</i>. <a href="https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-live-hhs-secretary-rfk-jr-testifies-on-2026-white-house-budget-request">https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-live-hhs-secretary-rfk-jr-testifies-on-2026-white-house-budget-request</a></p>

<p>May 15, 2025</p>	<p>Disability rights organizations host a roundtable discussing the state of autism services, civil rights, scientific integrity, and representation of disability in federal policy. RFK Jr. was invited to participate, but did not attend.</p> <p>The roundtable was hosted by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autism Society of America</li> <li>• Autistic Self Advocacy Network</li> <li>• Association of University Centers on Disabilities</li> <li>• Autistic People of Color Fund</li> <li>• Autistic Women &amp; Nonbinary Network</li> <li>• American Association of People with Disabilities</li> <li>• The Arc</li> <li>• National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities</li> </ul>	<p>Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN). (2025, May 15). <i>Autism Leaders United in Call for Action Following Roundtable in Washington D.C.</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Joint-Post-Roundtable-Statement.pdf">https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Joint-Post-Roundtable-Statement.pdf</a></p>
<p>May 15, 2025</p>	<p>The MAHA Commission Report was published.</p>	<p>The Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission. (2025, May 15). <i>The MAHA Report</i>. U.S. Office of the White House. <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/WH-The-MAHA-Report-Assessment.pdf">https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/WH-The-MAHA-Report-Assessment.pdf</a></p>
<p>May 16, 2025</p>	<p>A federal district court rules that HHS and RFK Jr. cannot terminate \$11 billion in public health funding. An injunction prevents HHS from implementing the funding terminations</p>	<p>Morse, S. (2025, May 20). Court order blocks HHS from cutting \$11 billion in public health funding. <i>Healthcare Finance News</i>. <a href="https://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/court-order-blocks-hhs-cutting-11-billion-public-health-funding">https://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/court-order-blocks-hhs-cutting-11-billion-public-health-funding</a></p>
<p>May 22, 2025</p>	<p>The MAHA Commission Report is released with the stated intention of “ending the childhood chronic disease crisis.”</p>	<p>The Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission. (2025, May 15). <i>The MAHA Report</i>. U.S. Office of the White House. <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/WH-The-MAHA-Report-Assessment.pdf">https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/WH-The-MAHA-Report-Assessment.pdf</a></p>

<p>May 27, 2025</p>	<p>RFK Jr. releases a video announcing that HHS will no longer recommend the COVID vaccine for healthy children or pregnant women.</p>	<p>Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. [@SecKennedy]. (2025, May 27). <i>Today, the COVID vaccine for healthy children and healthy pregnant women has been removed from @CDCgov recommended immunization schedule. Bottom line: it's common sense and it's good science. We are now one step closer to realizing @POTUS's promise to Make America Healthy Again</i> [Video attached] [Post]. X. <a href="https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1927368440811008138">https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1927368440811008138</a></p>
<p>May 27, 2025</p>	<p>NIH announces research grants to be awarded to institutions that research autism.</p>	<p>Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPS). (2025, June 30). <i>Autism Data Science Initiative Funding Opportunities</i>. U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). <a href="https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/autism-data-science-initiative/funding-opportunities">https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/autism-data-science-initiative/funding-opportunities</a></p>
<p>June 4, 2025</p>	<p>HHS appoints Paula Stannard as the Director for the Office of Civil Rights (OCR).</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, June 4). <i>HHS Announces Paula M. Stannard as Director of the Office for Civil Rights</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/ocr-announces-director.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/ocr-announces-director.html</a></p>
<p>June 9, 2025</p>	<p>Jim O'Neill is sworn in as the Deputy Secretary of HHS.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, June 9). <i>Jim O'Neill Sworn in as Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/jim-oneill-sworn-in-as-deputy-secretary.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/jim-oneill-sworn-in-as-deputy-secretary.html</a></p>
<p>June 9, 2025</p>	<p>RFK Jr. fires all sitting members of the ACIP with the intention of replacing them with new members.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, June 9). <i>HHS Takes Bold Step to Restore Public Trust in Vaccines by Reconstituting ACIP</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restore-public-trust-vaccines-acip.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restore-public-trust-vaccines-acip.html</a></p>
<p>June 12, 2025</p>	<p>RFK Jr. nominates eight new vaccine policy advisors to the ACIP. Most of the nominees have histories of spreading vaccine misinformation.</p>	<p>Stobbe, M. (2026, June 12). Kennedy's new CDC panel includes members who have criticized vaccines and spread misinformation. <i>AP News</i>. <a href="https://apnews.com/article/cdc-acip-vaccine-committee-9f58e1foo4075b081718ff078de88d76">https://apnews.com/article/cdc-acip-vaccine-committee-9f58e1foo4075b081718ff078de88d76</a></p>

June 16, 2025	Dr. Fiona Havers, senior advisor on vaccine policy, resigns from the CDC. She stated that she could no longer continue working at the CDC while the vaccination standards were dismantled.	Mandavilli, A. (2025, June 18). Why a Vaccine Expert Left the C.D.C.: 'Americans Are Going to Die'. <i>The New York Times</i> . <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/18/health/havers-cdc-vaccines-kennedy.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/18/health/havers-cdc-vaccines-kennedy.html</a>
June 25, 2025	RFK Jr. announces that HHS will no longer contribute to GAVI, an organization that provides vaccines for children around the world.	Sunny, M.E., & Rigby, J. (2025, June 25). US to stop financial support of global vaccine alliance Gavi, health secretary says. <i>Reuters</i> . <a href="https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-stop-financial-support-global-vaccine-alliance-gavi-says-health-secretary-2025-06-25/">https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-stop-financial-support-global-vaccine-alliance-gavi-says-health-secretary-2025-06-25/</a>
June 25-26, 2025	CDC holds their June ACIP meeting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vote on removal of thimerosal from flu vaccines.</li> <li>• Vote on RSV monoclonal antibody</li> </ul>	Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). (2025, June 24). <i>In ACIP Meeting Materials: June 25-26, 2025 Meeting</i> . U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/acip/meetings/presentation-slides-june-25-26-2025.html">https://www.cdc.gov/acip/meetings/presentation-slides-june-25-26-2025.html</a>
July 23, 2025	RFK Jr. signs ACIP's recommendation to remove thimerosal from flu vaccines.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, June 2023). <i>HHS Adopts ACIP Recommendation to Remove Thimerosal from All U.S. Influenza Vaccines</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/thimerosal-mercury-removed-from-us-flu-vaccines-acip.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/thimerosal-mercury-removed-from-us-flu-vaccines-acip.html</a>
July 31, 2025	Susan Monarez is sworn in as the CDC director.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, July 31). <i>Secretary Kennedy Swears in Susan Monarez as CDC Director to Advance 'Make America Healthy Again' Agenda</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/secretary-kennedy-swears-in-susan-monarez-cdc-director.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/secretary-kennedy-swears-in-susan-monarez-cdc-director.html</a>
August 1, 2025	HHS announces that they are repealing a policy that rewarded hospitals who reported staff vaccination rates.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, August 1). <i>HHS, CMS Eliminate Financial Pressure Tied to Hospital Staff Vaccination Reporting</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-cms-end-vaccine-reporting-incentives.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-cms-end-vaccine-reporting-incentives.html</a>

August 6, 2025	HHS cancels \$500 million in grants on mRNA vaccine research	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, August 5). <i>HHS Winds Down mRNA Vaccine Development Under BARDA</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/hhs-winds-down-mrna-vaccine-development-under-bar-da/">HHS Winds Down mRNA Vaccine Development Under BARDA   HHS.gov</a>
August 8, 2025	There is a shooting at the CDC headquarters. The shooter was identified as someone who believed he was harmed by the COVID vaccine.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, August 11). <i>Statement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-secretary-kennedy-visits-cdc-after-atlanta-shooting.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-secretary-kennedy-visits-cdc-after-atlanta-shooting.html</a>
August 14, 2025	HHS announces that they are reinstating the Task Force on Safer Childhood Vaccines for the first time since 1998.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, August 14). <i>HHS Revives Task Force on Safer Childhood Vaccines</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-reinstates-task-force-on-safer-childhood-vaccines.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-reinstates-task-force-on-safer-childhood-vaccines.html</a>
August 22, 2025	The CDC staff calls on RFK Jr. to stop promoting misinformation about vaccines.	Kekatos, M. (2025, August 20). 750 HHS employees send signed letter to RFK Jr. asking him to stop spreading misinformation. <i>ABC News</i> . <a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/750-hhs-employees-send-signed-letter-rfk-jr/story?id=124805697">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/750-hhs-employees-send-signed-letter-rfk-jr/story?id=124805697</a>
August 26, 2025	RFK Jr. fires Monarez, the CDC director. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monarez reports that she was asked to approve ACIP recommendations without review and to fire vaccine-related staff without cause. She was fired after she refused to follow these orders.</li> </ul>	Stobbe, Mike. (2025, August 27). CDC director Susan Monarez is fired and other agency leaders resign. <i>AP News</i> . <a href="https://apnews.com/article/cdc-director-susan-monarez-50dfbec849b53b4593755d2e6e616687">https://apnews.com/article/cdc-director-susan-monarez-50dfbec849b53b4593755d2e6e616687</a>  Seitz, A., & Jalonick, C.J. (2025, September 17). Fired CDC chief Susan Monarez warns senators that RFK Jr. is endangering public health. <i>AP News</i> . <a href="https://apnews.com/article/monarez-cdc-vaccines-kennedy-rfk-jr-194fd4336aaa74cb6e7c715d0605b47e">https://apnews.com/article/monarez-cdc-vaccines-kennedy-rfk-jr-194fd4336aaa74cb6e7c715d0605b47e</a>
August 27, 2025	The American Public Health Association releases a statement on Monarez's firing and RFK Jr.'s continued attack on public health.	American Public Health Association (APHA). (2025, August 27). <i>Kennedy's attack on public health must be stopped</i> [Press release]. <a href="https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/kennedy-attack-on-public-health">https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/kennedy-attack-on-public-health</a>

September 2, 2025	<p>RFK Jr. releases an op-ed on his plans to “restore public trust in the CDC.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In it, he criticizes the Biden administration’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>	<p>HHS Sec. Kennedy, R.F. (2026, September 2). Robert F. Kennedy Jr.: We’re Restoring Public Trust in the CDC. <i>Wall Street Journal (WSJ)</i>. <a href="https://www.wsj.com/opinion/robert-f-kennedy-jr-were-restoring-public-trust-in-the-cdc-6f26c176">https://www.wsj.com/opinion/robert-f-kennedy-jr-were-restoring-public-trust-in-the-cdc-6f26c176</a></p>
September 4, 2025	<p>RFK Jr. testifies in front of the Senate Finance Committee where he is questioned on his decisions as Secretary thus far.</p>	<p>Hubbard, K., &amp; Watson, K. (2025, September 4). RFK Jr. faces heated questions on CDC turmoil, vaccine changes at Senate hearing. <i>CBS News</i>. <a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/rfk-hearing-senate-finance-committee-cdc-vaccines/">https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/rfk-hearing-senate-finance-committee-cdc-vaccines/</a></p>
September 5, 2025	<p>A <i>Wall Street Journal</i> Exclusive says RFK Jr. and HHS will link autism to prenatal acetaminophen use and folate deficiencies</p>	<p>Whyte, L.E., &amp; Subbaraman, N. (2025, September 5). RFK Jr., HHS to Link Autism to Tylenol Use in Pregnancy and Folate Deficiencies. <i>Wall Street Journal (WSJ)</i>. <a href="https://www.wsj.com/health/healthcare/rfk-jr-hhs-to-link-autism-to-tylenol-use-in-pregnancy-and-folate-deficiencies-e3acbb4c?reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink">https://www.wsj.com/health/healthcare/rfk-jr-hhs-to-link-autism-to-tylenol-use-in-pregnancy-and-folate-deficiencies-e3acbb4c?reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink</a></p>
September 9, 2025	<p>FDA Commissioner Makary tells Press that the autism report “isn’t written” and the WSJ reporting is “premature”</p>	<p>FDA’s Makary Says Autism Report Isn’t Written, Calls WSJ Story ‘Premature’. (2025, September 9). <i>KFF Health News</i>. <a href="https://kffhealthnews.org/morning-breakout/fdas-makary-says-autism-report-isnt-written-calls-wsj-story-premature/">https://kffhealthnews.org/morning-breakout/fdas-makary-says-autism-report-isnt-written-calls-wsj-story-premature/</a></p>
September 11, 2025	<p>The CDC announces that it is awarding Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute a grant to research the link between autism and vaccines.</p>	<p>System for Award Management (SAM). (2025, September 11). Notice of Intent to Sole Source to <i>Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute</i>. U.S. CDC Office of Acquisition Services. <a href="https://sam.gov/workspace/contract/">https://sam.gov/workspace/contract/</a></p>
September 15, 2025	<p>ACIP announces the appointment of five new members.</p>	<p>Huang, P. (2025, September 15). 5 new members added to CDC vaccine advisory panel ahead of key meeting. <i>NPR</i>. <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/09/15/nx-s1-5542390/cdc-vaccine-advisers-committee">https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/09/15/nx-s1-5542390/cdc-vaccine-advisers-committee</a></p>

September 17, 2025	CDC releases their priorities, which includes discovering the causes of autism and researching vaccines.	U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2025, September 15). <i>CDC Priorities</i> . U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). <a href="https://cdc.gov/about/cdc/index.html">https://cdc.gov/about/cdc/index.html</a>
September 17, 2025	Monarez testifies in front of the HELP committee regarding her time at HHS and her removal.	Restoring Trust Through Radical Transparency: Reviewing Recent Events at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Implications for Children's Health, Hearing before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee, 119th Congress. (2025) <a href="https://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/restoring-trust-through-radical-transparency-reviewing-recent-events-at-the-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-and-implications-for-childrens-health">https://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/restoring-trust-through-radical-transparency-reviewing-recent-events-at-the-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-and-implications-for-childrens-health</a>
September 18-19, 2025	ACIP holds their September meeting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They failed to pass a call for prescription requirements and tabled a vote on the Hepatitis B vaccine votes.</li> </ul>	Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). (2025, December 3). <i>ACIP Meeting Information</i> . U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/acip/meetings/index.html">https://www.cdc.gov/acip/meetings/index.html</a>
September 19, 2025	ACIP recommends that the vaccination for COVID-19 be determined by individual decision making. They say they cannot provide a blanket recommendation to receive the vaccine.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, September 19). <i>ACIP Recommends COVID-19 Immunization Based on Individual Decision-making</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/acip-recommends-covid19-vaccination-individual-decision-making.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/acip-recommends-covid19-vaccination-individual-decision-making.html</a>
September 19, 2025	Trump announces that he has “something big coming about autism” and reasserts that autism is a concern of his administration.	Aaron Rupar. [@atrupar.com]. (2025, September 19). <i>Trump: “I think we’re gonna have something very very big coming up soon on autism. Autism is totally out of control ... we’re gonna have a news conference early next week on autism.”</i> [Video clip] [Post]. BlueSky. <a href="https://bsky.app/profile/atrupar.com/post/3lz7sbm63wg2q">https://bsky.app/profile/atrupar.com/post/3lz7sbm63wg2q</a>

<p>September 22, 2025</p>	<p>RFK Jr. announces that HHS is working on a treatment pathway and investing in research regarding autism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They announce that the FDA is publishing a label update for leucovorin establishing it as a treatment for children with autism.</li> <li>• They also announced that they will issue a physician notice and start a public campaign that acetaminophen causes autism when used during pregnancy.</li> </ul>	<p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, September 22). <i>President Trump, Secretary Kennedy Announce Bold Actions to Tackle Autism Epidemic</i> [Press release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-trump-kennedy-autism-initiatives-leucovorin-tylenol-research-2025.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-trump-kennedy-autism-initiatives-leucovorin-tylenol-research-2025.html</a></p> <p>FDA Commissioner Makary, M. (2025, September 22). <i>Notice to Physicians on the Use of Acetaminophen During Pregnancy</i> [Letter]. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. <a href="https://www.fda.gov/media/188843/download?attachment">https://www.fda.gov/media/188843/download?attachment</a></p> <p>U.S. Office of the White House. (2025, September 22). <i>President Trump Makes an Announcement on Medical and Scientific Findings for America's Children</i> [Video]. <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/videos/president-trump-makes-an-announcement-on-medical-and-scientific-findings-for-americas-children/">https://www.whitehouse.gov/videos/president-trump-makes-an-announcement-on-medical-and-scientific-findings-for-americas-children/</a></p>
<p>September 22, 2025</p>	<p>Senator Bill Cassidy states that contrary to what RFK Jr. has stated, there is no link between autism and Tylenol.</p>	<p>U.S. Senator Cassidy. [@@ SenBillCassidy]. (2025, September 22). <i>I understand and applaud President Trump's desire to address this issue and to support HHS. HHS should release the new data that it has to support this claim. The preponderance of evidence shows that this is not the case. The concern is that women will be left with no options to manage pain in pregnancy. We must be compassionate to this problem.</i> [Post]. X. <a href="https://x.com/senbillcassidy/">https://x.com/senbillcassidy/</a></p>
<p>September 24, 2025</p>	<p>The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issues an open Call for Nominations of individuals to serve as non-federal public members on the next iteration of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC). Nominations are initially accepted through the deadline of Monday, November 10, 2025.</p>	<p>Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC). (2025, September 24). <i>HHS Seeks Nominations for IACC Public Membership</i>. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <a href="https://iacc.hhs.gov/about-iacc/join/call-for-nominations/2025/">https://iacc.hhs.gov/about-iacc/join/call-for-nominations/2025/</a></p>

September 25, 2025	HHS publishes a citizen petition from Informed Consent Network requesting that the FDA pursue regulations to add a warning label to Tylenol products that prenatal use leads to an increased risk of autism.	U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Citizen Petition from Siri & Glimstad LLP on behalf of Informed Consent Action Network (September 25, 2025), <a href="https://www.regulations.gov/document/FDA-2025-P-4153-0001">https://www.regulations.gov/document/FDA-2025-P-4153-0001</a>
September 26, 2025	NIH awards \$50 million in research grants to 13 beneficiaries as part of the Autism Data Science Initiative	Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPS). (2025, December 17). <i>Autism Data Science Initiative Funded Research</i> . U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). <a href="https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/autism-data-science-initiative/funded-research">https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/autism-data-science-initiative/funded-research</a>
September 27, 2025	RFK Jr.'s supporters organize a series of rallies to support him against increasing scrutiny from Congress.	Paun, C. (2025, September 18). MAHA fights back. <i>Politico</i> . <a href="https://www.politico.com/news/2025/09/18/rfk-jr-s-movement-is-coming-to-his-defense-00571826">https://www.politico.com/news/2025/09/18/rfk-jr-s-movement-is-coming-to-his-defense-00571826</a>
September 30, 2025	The American Association of Pediatrics asserts that acetaminophen products are safe for pregnant women and there is no link to Autism.	American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). (2025, October 29). <i>Acetaminophen is Safe for Children When Taken as Directed, No Link to Autism</i> . Fact Checked. <a href="https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/fact-checked/acetaminophen-is-safe-for-children-when-taken-as-directed-no-link-to-autism">https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/fact-checked/acetaminophen-is-safe-for-children-when-taken-as-directed-no-link-to-autism</a> <a href="https://www.aap.org/">https://www.aap.org/</a>
October 6, 2025	The CDC endorses the recommendations of ACIP. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACIP recommends that children get separate vaccines for chicken pox and measles, and mumps and rubella.</li> <li>• They remove the recommendation that adults over 65 receive the Covid vaccine and that adults under 65 talk with their doctor about if they should receive the vaccine.</li> <li>• They also call for separated MMR vaccines.</li> </ul>	Gardner, L., & Gardner, S. (2025, October 6). CDC endorses RFK Jr. vaccine panel recommendations. <i>Politico</i> . <a href="https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/06/cdc-endorses-vaccine-panel-changes-to-covid-mmr-v-shot-recommendations-00594763">https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/06/cdc-endorses-vaccine-panel-changes-to-covid-mmr-v-shot-recommendations-00594763</a>

October 9, 2025	<p>RFK Jr. emphasizes in a Cabinet Meeting that Tylenol usage is linked to autism and claimed that the government is “doing the research to make the proof.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He also states that there “are two studies that show that children who are circumcised early have double the rate of autism, and it’s highly likely it’s because they’re given Tylenol.”</li> </ul>	<p>Dorn, S. (2025, October 9). Trump And RFK Jr. Double Down On Unproven Tylenol-Autism Link: ‘We’re Doing The Studies To Make The Proof’. <i>Forbes</i>. <a href="https://www.forbes.com/sites/saradorn/2025/10/09/trump-and-rfk-jr-double-down-on-unproven-tylenol-autism-link-were-doing-the-studies-to-make-the-proof/">https://www.forbes.com/sites/saradorn/2025/10/09/trump-and-rfk-jr-double-down-on-unproven-tylenol-autism-link-were-doing-the-studies-to-make-the-proof/</a></p>
October 10, 2025	<p>Citing a government shutdown, HHS fires CDC, SAMHSA, and Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) employees during a mass reduction in force.</p>	<p>Swenson, A., &amp; Aleccia, J. (October 13, 2025). Federal employees in mental health and disease control were among targets in weekend firings. <i>AP News</i>. <a href="https://apnews.com/article/trump-health-hhs-layoffs-rif-firings-cdc-813cb7d6df9e3f43ea929b09d103ec05">https://apnews.com/article/trump-health-hhs-layoffs-rif-firings-cdc-813cb7d6df9e3f43ea929b09d103ec05</a></p>
October 11, 2025	<p>Whooping cough outbreak begins, the worst outbreak in more than a decade.</p>	<p>O’Neill, E. (2025, October 11). Worst U.S. whooping cough outbreak in a decade has infected thousands. <i>NPR</i>. <a href="https://www.npr.org/2024/10/10/nx-s1-5127422/whooping-cough-outbreak-u-s-seattle">https://www.npr.org/2024/10/10/nx-s1-5127422/whooping-cough-outbreak-u-s-seattle</a></p>
October 14, 2025	<p>HHS announces in a court filing that officials accidentally laid off twice as many people as they intended to when issuing October reductions-in-force.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 982 employees were intended to be laid off, but 1,260 employees received a layoff notice.</li> </ul>	<p>Decl. of Thomas J. Nagly Jr. at 49, American Federation of Government Employees, AFL CIO v. United States Office of Management and Budget, 3:25-cv-08302, (N.D. Cal. Oct. 14, 2025). <a href="http://gov.uscourts.cand.457131.49.1.pdf">gov.uscourts.cand.457131.49.1.pdf</a></p>
October 22-23, 2025	<p>HHS indefinitely postpones the October ACIP meeting scheduled for this date.</p>	<p>Schreiber, M. (2025, October 27). Threat to US vaccines as CDC staff supporting key advisory panel laid off. <i>The Guardian</i>. <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/27/vaccines-rfk-jr-cdc-acip-panel">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/27/vaccines-rfk-jr-cdc-acip-panel</a></p>
October 28, 2025	<p>RFK Jr. fires Steven Hatfill, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, for claiming that he was the chief medical officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hatfill has been an ally of RFK Jr. and has supported him on defunding vaccine research</li> </ul>	<p>Stolberg, S.G. (2025, October 28). Steven Hatfill, Covid Vaccine Critic, Is Ousted From H.H.S. <i>The New York Times</i>. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/28/us/politics/hatfill-covid-hhs-ousted.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/28/us/politics/hatfill-covid-hhs-ousted.html</a></p>

October 29, 2025	RFK Jr. rolls back a previous claim regarding the connection between acetaminophen and autism and announces in a press conference that there is not sufficient evidence that Tylenol “definitely causes autism.”	Aaron Rupar. [@atrupar]. (2025, October 29) RFK Jr: “ <i>The causative association between Tylenol given in pregnancy in the paranatal periods is not sufficient to say it definitely causes autism. But it is very suggestive.</i> ” [C-Span Video] [Post]. X. <a href="https://x.com/atrupar/status/1983591905385390220">https://x.com/atrupar/status/1983591905385390220</a>
October 30, 2025	Casey Means’ confirmation hearing for Surgeon General is postponed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Means has a history of being anti-vaccine and left her surgical residency due to being “disillusioned” by the practice of medicine.</li> </ul>	Hooper, K., & Gardner, S. (2025, October 30). Casey Means’ labor delays confirmation hearing. <i>Politico</i> . <a href="https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-pulse/2025/10/30/casey-means-labor-delays-confirmation-hearing-00628242">https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-pulse/2025/10/30/casey-means-labor-delays-confirmation-hearing-00628242</a>
November 11, 2025	FDA appoints Dr. Richard Pazur, a highly respected veteran of the Department, to lead their drug regulation division.	Jewett, C., & Robbins, R. (2025, November 11). F.D.A. Names Agency Veteran to Run Drug Division. <i>The New York Times</i> . <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/11/science/richard-pazdur-fda-drug-director.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/11/science/richard-pazdur-fda-drug-director.html</a>
November 20, 2025	CDC changes language on their website to include a statement that “Vaccines do not cause autism’ is not an evidence-based claim.”	Breen, K., Kaplan, M., Dr. Gounder, C. (2025, November 22). CDC website is changed to include false claim about autism and vaccines. <i>CBS News</i> . <a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cdc-website-change-vaccines-autism/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cdc-website-change-vaccines-autism/</a>
November 24, 2025	HHS announces five new appointees to “advance MAHA goals.”	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2025, November 24). <i>HHS Announces Five New Agency Leaders to Advance MAHA Goals</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-five-new-agency-leaders-maha.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-five-new-agency-leaders-maha.html</a>
November 25, 2025	Dr. Ralph Abraham, a vaccine skeptic, is named as CDC’s Principal Deputy Director.	Mandavilli, A. (2025, November 27). Doctor Critical of Vaccines Quietly Appointed as C.D.C.’s Second in Command. <i>The New York Times</i> . <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/25/health/cdc-ralph-lee-abraham-vaccines.html?smid=nytcore-android-share">https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/25/health/cdc-ralph-lee-abraham-vaccines.html?smid=nytcore-android-share</a>
November 28, 2025	An internal memo from the FDA stated that there were 10 deaths of children due to the COVID vaccine. This claim was later rescinded. No data was shared.	Jewett, C. (2025, November 28). F.D.A. Seeks More Oversight of Vaccine Trials and Approvals. <i>The New York Times</i> . <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/28/health/fda-children-deaths-covid-vaccines.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/28/health/fda-children-deaths-covid-vaccines.html</a>

December 2, 2025	Dr. Richard Pazur, head of drug regulation for the FDA, announces his retirement, weeks after taking the position.	Owermohle, S., Cancryn, A., et. al. (2025, December 2). FDA's top drug officer set to exit, weeks into new role. <i>CNN</i> . <a href="https://www.cnn.com/2025/12/02/health/fda-departure-pazdur">https://www.cnn.com/2025/12/02/health/fda-departure-pazdur</a>
December 3, 2025	Twelve former FDA commissioners released a statement condemning HHS's actions to dismantle the regulatory scheme for vaccines.	Califf, R. M., Von Eschenbach, A. C., Friedman, M. A., et. al. (2025). A threat to Evidence-Based vaccine policy and public health security at the FDA. <i>New England Journal of Medicine</i> , 394(1), 4–6. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmp2517497">https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmp2517497</a>
December 4, 2025	HHS publishes a notice in the Federal Register that extends the deadline for IACC Nominations to January 2, 2026.	2025 Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee call for nominations announcement. (2025, December 4). Federal Register. <a href="https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/04/2025-21902/2025-interagency-autism-coordinating-committee-call-for-nominations-announcement">https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/04/2025-21902/2025-interagency-autism-coordinating-committee-call-for-nominations-announcement</a>
December 4-5, 2025	ACIP holds their December meeting.	CNN Health. (2025, December 4). December 4, 2025 — CDC vaccine advisers meeting news. <i>CNN</i> . <a href="https://www.cnn.com/health/live-news/cdc-vaccine-meeting-hepatitis-b-12-04-25">https://www.cnn.com/health/live-news/cdc-vaccine-meeting-hepatitis-b-12-04-25</a>
December 5, 2025	ACIP votes to switch universal birth dose recommendation to only birth dose for hep B positive mothers and for hep B negative mothers to first dose at two months of age and under shared clinical decision making.	Mandavilli, A. (2025, December 5). Panel Votes to Stop Recommending Hepatitis B Shots at Birth for Most Newborns. <i>The New York Times</i> . <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/05/health/kennedy-vaccine-committee-vote-hepatitisb.html?smid=nytcore-android-share">https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/05/health/kennedy-vaccine-committee-vote-hepatitisb.html?smid=nytcore-android-share</a>
December 5, 2025	The White House issues a presidential memo outlining the successes of MAHA thus far and providing a directive to align the U.S. vaccine schedule with allied countries.	U.S. Office of the White House. (2025, December 5). Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Begins Process to Align U.S. Core Childhood Vaccine Recommendations with Best Practices from Peer, Developed Countries. <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/12/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-begins-process-to-align-u-s-core-childhood-vaccine-recommendations-with-best-practices-from-peer-developed-countries/">https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/12/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-begins-process-to-align-u-s-core-childhood-vaccine-recommendations-with-best-practices-from-peer-developed-countries/</a>

December 9, 2025	Democratic members of the Senate HELP Committee issue a letter to Ranking Member Cassidy requesting an oversight hearing of Secretary Kennedy.	U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. (2025, December 9). <i>NEWS: Sanders, HELP Committee Democrats Call on Cassidy to Have Secretary Kennedy Testify Before HELP Committee</i> [Press Release]. <a href="https://www.help.senate.gov/dem/newsroom/press/news-sanders-help-committee-democrats-call-on-cassidy-to-have-secretary-kennedy-testify-before-help-committee">https://www.help.senate.gov/dem/newsroom/press/news-sanders-help-committee-democrats-call-on-cassidy-to-have-secretary-kennedy-testify-before-help-committee</a>
December 15, 2025	Secretary Kennedy appoints three individuals who have historically linked vaccines and autism to the IACC before the deadline for nominations has closed.	Gardner, L. (2025, December 15). Kennedy appoints members to autism panel who tout possible vaccines link. <i>Politico</i> . <a href="https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/12/kennedy-appoints-members-to-autism-panel-who-tout-possible-vaccines-link-00691951">https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/12/kennedy-appoints-members-to-autism-panel-who-tout-possible-vaccines-link-00691951</a>
December 16, 2025	Former National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) director Jeanne Marrazzo sues Secretary Kennedy for illegally terminating her for being a whistle blower.	Complaint at 1, <i>Marrazzo v. Kennedy</i> , 1:25-cv-04144-JRR, (D. Md. Civ. Dec, 16, 2025). <a href="https://katzbanks.com/wp-content/uploads/1-Civil-Complaint.pdf">https://katzbanks.com/wp-content/uploads/1-Civil-Complaint.pdf</a>
December 16, 2025	A meeting of the Advisory Commission on Childhood Vaccines (ACCV) is announced for December 29, 2025.	<i>Meeting of the Advisory Commission on Childhood Vaccines</i> . (2025, December 16). Federal Register. <a href="https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/16/2025-22982/meeting-of-the-advisory-commission-on-childhood-vaccines">https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/16/2025-22982/meeting-of-the-advisory-commission-on-childhood-vaccines</a>
December 17, 2025	American Academy of Pediatrics loses government funding	Yang, M. (2025, December 18). American Academy of Pediatrics loses government funding after criticizing RFK Jr. <i>The Guardian</i> . <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/dec/17/american-academy-pediatrics-funding-rfk">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/dec/17/american-academy-pediatrics-funding-rfk</a>

December 18, 2025	HHS announces it will fund a study on the Hepatitis B Vaccine in Guinea-Bissau, raising ethical concerns.	<p>Notice of Award of a Single Source Unsolicited Grant To Fund University of Southern Denmark (SDU), 90 FR 59124 (published Dec. 18, 2025).</p> <p><a href="https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/18/2025-23245/notice-of-award-of-a-single-source-unsolicited-grant-to-fund-university-of-southern-denmark-sdu#page-59125">https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/18/2025-23245/notice-of-award-of-a-single-source-unsolicited-grant-to-fund-university-of-southern-denmark-sdu#page-59125</a></p>
December 20, 2025	Secretary Kennedy planned to announce that HHS would adopt the vaccine schedule from Denmark, but the press conference is canceled at the last minute.	<p>Röhn, T. (2025, December 20). RFK Jr. wanted to endorse the Danish vaccine schedule. He was forced to pull back. <i>Politico</i>. <a href="https://www.politico.com/news/2025/12/20/rfk-kennedy-danish-vaccine-schedule-denmark-00701999?nid=0000014f-1646-d88f-a1cf-5f46b7bd0000&amp;nname=playbook&amp;nrid=00000167-79eb-d6f7-adf7-7bebde1b0000&amp;utm_source=semafor">https://www.politico.com/news/2025/12/20/rfk-kennedy-danish-vaccine-schedule-denmark-00701999?nid=0000014f-1646-d88f-a1cf-5f46b7bd0000&amp;nname=playbook&amp;nrid=00000167-79eb-d6f7-adf7-7bebde1b0000&amp;utm_source=semafor</a></p>
December 29, 2025	The ACCV meeting is held to discuss changes to the VICP. Half of the members who previously sat on the committee were removed.	<p>Weixel, N. (2026, January 14). RFK Jr. dismissed members of childhood vaccine injury panel. <i>The Hill</i>. <a href="https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/5689850-kennedy-dismisses-vaccine-advisors/">https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/5689850-kennedy-dismisses-vaccine-advisors/</a></p>
January 2, 2026	Applications truly close for IACC Nominations	<p>2025 Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee call for nominations announcement. (2025b, December 4). Federal Register. <a href="https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/04/2025-21902/2025-interagency-autism-coordinating-committee-call-for-nominations-announcement">https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/04/2025-21902/2025-interagency-autism-coordinating-committee-call-for-nominations-announcement</a></p>
January 5, 2026	Secretary Kennedy alters the vaccine schedule for children without recommendation by ACIP, dropping the number of recommendations from 17 to 11.	<p>Mandavilli, A. (2026, January 5). Kennedy Scales Back the Number of Vaccines Recommended for Children. <i>The New York Times</i>. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/05/health/children-vaccines-cdc-kennedy.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/05/health/children-vaccines-cdc-kennedy.html</a></p>
January 13, 2026	FDA removes the web page warning individuals about the dangers of some autism treatments.	<p>Taylor L. (2026). FDA removes web page warning of dangers of unproved autism treatments. <i>BMJ</i>, 392, s112. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.s112">https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.s112</a></p>

January 13, 2026	Secretary Kennedy appoints two OB-GYNs to ACIP, rebranding the committee as a “watchdog” to investigate if vaccines cause harm.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2026, January 13). <i>Secretary Kennedy Appoints Two OB-GYNs to CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices</i> [Press release]. <a href="https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/secretary-kennedy-appoints-two-ob-gyns-cdc-advisory-committee-immunization-practices.html">https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/secretary-kennedy-appoints-two-ob-gyns-cdc-advisory-committee-immunization-practices.html</a>
January 14, 2026	In a HELP hearing, Sen. Murray calls for Sec. Kennedy to testify on recent vaccine policies.	Peter Sullivan. [@PeterSullivan4]. (2026, January 14) <i>Sen. Murray asks at HELP hearing on abortion pill why there hasn’t been a hearing on recent RFK vaccine moves “Wasn’t he supposed to be here quarterly?” she says.</i> [Post] X. <a href="https://x.com/PeterSullivan4/status/2011457525317509538?s=20">https://x.com/PeterSullivan4/status/2011457525317509538?s=20</a>
January 15, 2026	CDC cancels a study on Hepatitis B vaccines in Guinea-Bissau due to ethical concerns about the study’s protocol.	Schreiber, M. (2026, January 16). Controversial US study on hepatitis B vaccines in Africa ‘cancelled’. <i>The Guardian</i> . <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/15/hepatitis-b-vaccines-study-africa-cancel">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/15/hepatitis-b-vaccines-study-africa-cancel</a>
January 16, 2026	New research is published reinforcing that use of acetaminophen during pregnancy does not lead to Autism.	D’Antonio, F., Elena Flacco, M., & Della Valle, L. (2026). Prenatal paracetamol exposure and child neurodevelopment: a systematic review and meta-analysis. <i>The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology, &amp; Women’s Health</i> <a href="https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanogw/article/PIIS3050-5038(25)00211-0/fulltext">https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanogw/article/PIIS3050-5038(25)00211-0/fulltext</a>