

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. praises Texas doctor who exposed community to measles

Bill Shaw
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Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. praised Dr. Ben Edwards as an “extraordinary healer” just one week after Edwards was seen on a video treating patients while himself infected with measles. The video was produced by Children’s Health Defense, a notorious anti-vaccination organization for which Kennedy was chairman until he stepped down after being nominated.

In the video, Edwards is seen treating patients and interacting with their families while he himself clearly has a visible rash. When asked if he were suffering from measles, Edwards confirmed, saying that his symptoms began one day prior to the recording of the video: “Yesterday was pretty achy. Little mild fever. Spots came in the afternoon. Today, I woke up feeling good.”

The clinic where the video was shot is one Edwards set up in Seminole, Texas, which is at the center of the Texas outbreak that has now infected 597 individuals, killing two. Another 62 have been hospitalized.

Kennedy tweeted his praise for Edwards after visiting the community in response to the second death of a child from measles there:

I also visited with these two extraordinary healers, Dr. Richard Bartlett and Dr. Ben Edwards who have treated and healed some 300 measles-stricken Mennonite children using aerosolized budesonide and clarithromycin.

These treatments are unproven and not recommended for either measles treatment or prevention. The Texas State Department of Health Services refused to recommend them despite Edwards’ request. Edwards

has also been using other unproven remedies, including Vitamin A and cod liver oil, at his clinic.

Measles is standardly considered contagious up to four days prior to, and four days after, the appearance of a rash. Thus Edwards, having had a rash for only one day, would clearly have been contagious and thus placed his patients, their families, the clinic staff and his colleagues at risk. It is not clear if he had other interactions at the clinic or in the community while he was contagious with measles.

Edwards attempted to deflect criticism by saying that all the patients he saw that day already had measles and thus they were not at increased risk. However, this blithe and disingenuous statement ignores the patients’ families and all the other individuals in the community with whom he came into contact. Additionally, there is no shortage of other doctors to see and treat these patients, thus Edwards’ presence at the clinic that day was not essential.

“Dr. Edwards’ choice to continue treating patients while symptomatic with measles—documented in video footage—represents one of the most fundamental breaches of infection control possible,” Dr. Jess Steier a public health scientist who runs the Science Literacy Lab noted on a Substack she co-authored last week. “The fact that this practice reportedly continued while treating vulnerable populations, including infants and children, raises the most serious ethical and public health concerns.”

The danger to those people exposed to Edwards is considerable. Measles is well known as one of the most contagious viruses known to humankind. Approximately one in five unvaccinated individuals who contract measles requires hospitalization. One in 20 children with measles subsequently get a pneumonia, which is the most common cause of death

from measles. One to three in 1,000 with measles die from the disease.

It is therefore a grotesque ethical violation on Edwards' part to expose the people on the video, and with whom he otherwise interacted while ill, to measles. His callous indifference is made all the worse by the low vaccination rates in his community, a situation he himself has helped to create. Edwards is a notorious anti-vaccine charlatan and he does not offer vaccinations at his makeshift clinic in Seminole.

That Kennedy would praise this charlatan is no surprise. The Children's Health Defense support of both men provides a direct link and shared anti-vaccination ideology between them. Although it is not known whether Kennedy was aware of the video at the time he made the tweet, it likely would have made little difference.

Furthermore, Kennedy's anti-vaccination agenda and enthusiasm for unproven treatments is well known and made clear by his tweet, which he made in the wake of the second tragic and preventable death of a child from measles in Texas.

"I think [it] is unfortunately perfectly on-brand for how he thinks that medicine should be practiced," Dr. Craig Spencer, a medical doctor and professor at the Brown University School of Public Health told Spectrum News of Kennedy. "And that is what makes me remarkably uncomfortable and extremely concerned and scared for the next three-and-a-half years."

The attacks on public health overseen by the Democrats and Republicans have enabled and fostered the rise of Kennedy and his anti-science, anti-public health policies. The goal is nothing less than the gutting of public health protections in the pursuit of ever greater profits, no matter the consequences for the quality of life for the vast majority of the population.

The working class can only oppose this agenda and place lives over profits through its own independent socialist political program which places the needs of the population over corporate interests.



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