

# Robert F. Kennedy Jr. unleashes a barrage of anti-science ravings

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Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has made a series of false claims in recent days that harken back to the time before he was nominated for the post. From anti-scientific claims about the contents of the measles vaccine to allegations that the department he now heads, under the Biden administration, was engaged in child trafficking, Kennedy has suddenly reverted to his practice of promoting fringe conspiracies.

## Fantasies about the MMR vaccine

In a live broadcast on News Nation on Wednesday, referring to the measles outbreak in West Texas, Kennedy said:

There are populations in our country like the Mennonites in Texas, were most afflicted [sic], and they have religious objections to the vaccination because the MMR vaccine contains a lot of aborted fetus debris and DNA particles.

The measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine does not contain any cells or tissue at all, let alone fetal tissue. Nor does the production of the vaccine rely on fetal parts. Rather the viruses in the vaccine are grown in various cell cultures and then purified to ensure the vaccines contain no cellular components.

Dr. Miriam Laufer, Interim Director of the Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health at the University of Maryland, told Reuters: “The virus is grown in these cells, then this virus is purified, meaning everything other than the virus is filtered out, and all that’s left is this attenuated virus that can’t make you sick.”

The rubella component of the MMR vaccine is typically cultured in the human fibroblast cell line WI-38. Cell lines are considered “immortalized” because they can reproduce new cells indefinitely. The WI-38 cell line dates all the way back to the 1960s where it was derived from an aborted fetus from a woman in Sweden. This is where the false narrative of fetal tissue in the vaccines originates.

Given that rubella infection is a devastating disease during pregnancy, it is notable that the rubella vaccine has prevented innumerable fetal abortions and stillbirths. In the 1964-1965 rubella epidemic, 11,000 women lost their pregnancies, and 2,100 newborns died. For infants who manage to survive to birth, congenital rubella syndrome is typically devastating with cataracts, heart defects, deafness and developmental delays.

Kennedy also said recently that the mumps component of the vaccine was ineffective and posed unspecified safety concerns. At a live televised

town hall on Monday, Kennedy said: “The problem is really with the mumps portion of the vaccine and the combination. That combination was never safety tested.”

These claims too have no scientific basis and are patently false. The mumps component of the vaccine, after a full series of MMR vaccination, provides 86 percent effectiveness against infection when a vaccinated child is exposed to the virus. There is abundant experience with the MMR vaccine that demonstrates its safety as well.

During the worst measles outbreak in the United States since 2019, Kennedy has also falsely claimed that the measles vaccine causes deaths, promoted quack measles remedies, including vitamin A, and begun the process of reviving comprehensively debunked claims that the vaccine causes autism.

Also this week, Kennedy doubled down on vitamins as a treatment for measles. An HHS spokesperson told CBS News:

Secretary Kennedy will be enlisting the entire agency to activate a scientific process to treat a host of diseases, including measles, with single or multiple existing drugs in combination with vitamins and other modalities.

Finally, Kennedy in the same town hall where he made the outlandish “fetus debris” claim, also encouraged parents to “do their own research,” saying:

...part of the responsibility of being a parent is to do your own research. You research the baby stroller, you research the foods that they’re getting, and you need to research the medicines that they’re taking as well.

The phrase “do your own research” is the rallying cry of the anti-vaccination movement. What it really intends to encourage is for people to access the flood of vaccine misinformation and anti-scientific garbage promoted by Kennedy and his ilk, particularly on the internet. It explicitly avoids and even discourages accessing and understanding actual scientific information and medical knowledge.

Experts have condemned Kennedy’s remarks and highlighted the danger they pose. Hassan Vally, associate professor of epidemiology at Deakin University in Melbourne Australia said on LinkedIn:

... we can’t let a single piece of misinformation or distortion from RFK Jr. go unchallenged. We must consistently call out falsehoods and be unequivocal when he crosses the line into outright lies.

His recent claims about the MMR vaccine containing “fetal debris” are not only demonstrably false, but dangerously irresponsible. And his fearmongering around DNA fragments in the vaccine is a deliberate distortion of the science.

The MMR vaccine is an extraordinary scientific achievement that has unequivocally saved millions of lives and prevented millions more from suffering severe disability. Kennedy’s deliberate false narrative, sowing doubt and fear about the MMR vaccine, is a reprehensible act that experts caution will cost lives.

## The “chemtrails” conspiracy theory

The second major flight of fancy that Kennedy engaged this week involves fringe allegations about “chemtrails.” The chemtrails myth alleges that the US government is including toxic chemicals in jet airplanes, whereby these chemicals end up in the contrails the jets leave behind as they fly. Contrails are condensed water vapor and ice crystals that appear as white streaks in the sky in the wake of airplanes.

At the same town hall on Monday during which he called into question the mumps vaccine, Kennedy said in a response to a question about chemtrails from an audience member:

It’s done, we think, by DARPA [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency]. And a lot of it now is coming out of the jet fuel—so those materials are put in jet fuel. I’m going to do everything in my power to stop it. We’re bringing on somebody who’s going to think only about that, find out who’s doing it, and holding them accountable.

The adherents of this fringe theory believe that the “chemicals” are intended for various nefarious purposes such as mind control, mass sterilization, and controlling the weather, including creating or intensifying hurricanes.

The theory originated in the 1990s and has waxed and waned in popularity since then. With a prominent government official like Kennedy promulgating the lies, the chemtrails fringe narrative is now enjoying renewed popularity.

Multiple government agencies are falsely implicated. Kennedy’s calling out of DARPA is significant. DARPA is a frequent target as a result of its past research on climate change, geoengineering, weather modification, and “atmospheric sensing,” whereby sensors in the atmosphere are used to detect certain events like bomb explosions.

Due to the false narrative around weather control, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is also a frequent target of people who believe in the story. Dr. David W. Fahey, Director of the Chemical Sciences Laboratory of the NOAA Earth System Research Laboratory, told the *Guardian* that the conspiracy theory “...bubbles up every once in a while and the hurricanes and weather modification kind of brings it up to the floor again.”

Research has repeatedly debunked the chemtrails theory. However, the reaction of proponents of chemtrails is often to target the messenger. Ken Caldeira, a climate scientist who carried out a 2016 study debunking the chemtrails narrative received multiple death threats.

Caldeira told the *Guardian* last December:

I felt like it was a risk to my personal safety. People have bought into this false narrative. We’re now seeing a worrying resurgence of conspiracy theories in general, from chemtrails to vaccines. There’s a detachment from facts and rational analysis.

This is not the first time Kennedy supported the chemtrails theory. He responded to a tweet on Twitter/X promoting the theory in November 2024, saying he would end the alleged practice.

As fringe unscientific and unproven theories go, chemtrails is at the extreme. That one of its adherents is now Secretary of Health and Human Services is highly dangerous.

## Child trafficking at HHS

In his third major effort at lending credence to debunked conspiracy theories, Kennedy claimed that his own department, Health and Human Services, had been engaged in child trafficking prior to his appointment as secretary. In the videotaped, highly performative presidential cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Kennedy said:

We have ended HHS as the—the role as the vector—the principal vector in this country for child trafficking. And during the Biden administration, HHS became a collaborator in child trafficking and for sex and for—for slavery. And we have ended that. And we’re very aggressively going out and trying to find these children. That’s 300,000 children that were lost by the Biden administration.

As with his other canards in the last week, there is zero truth to these allegations either. The reference to the 300,000 echoes claims made by both Kennedy and Donald Trump on the campaign trail, at the time Kennedy was also a presidential candidate prior to dropping out and endorsing Trump.

The 300,000 number originates from an August 2024 report from the Department of Homeland Security about immigrant and refugee children. The report noted that 32,000 unaccompanied minors who entered the US failed to make scheduled appearances at immigration courts. Another 291,000 children received no notice to appear at all.

However, just because 291,000 children did not receive a court notice does not mean that they are being trafficked or abused. The government simply does not know, due to the failure to provide the resources to ensure the welfare of these children and rigorously document their efforts. No evidence exists that these children are the victims of trafficking or that government employees are directing or facilitating it.

HHS comes into the narrative because the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is part of HHS and has primary responsibility for the welfare of unaccompanied minor immigrants and refugees. The “child trafficking” smear is particularly vicious because it was the Trump administration in its first term which greatly expanded the practice of separating children from their parents or other adult relatives while they were in detention. The children were handed over to ORR while the Department of Homeland Security retained control of the parents. Later, when the two agencies could not match children still in the US with parents who had been deported, many of these family separations became permanent.

Rather than asking for appropriate resources to uncover the fate of these

children, Kennedy has instead been involved in gutting his agency, cutting 25 percent of its workforce. Furthermore, the Trump administration has made deep cuts to the Court Appointed Special Advocates Guardians Ad Litem (abbreviated as CASA/GAL or CASA) program.

This program is designed to combat child trafficking, the social evil that Kennedy claims to care about. However, CASA program officials were notified by the Trump administration that its grants, authorized by Congress, were canceled because they “no longer effectuate the program goals or agency priorities.”

## Conclusion

During the process of his nomination and confirmation to head HHS, Kennedy avoided articulating the false claims and bizarre narratives that he was identified with for many years prior to the 2024 presidential campaign. Even in his first weeks as secretary, while he had made multiple statements that promote anti-scientific narratives on vaccines and quack remedies for measles, he had been silent on the most lunatic fringe theories. No longer.

It would be easy to dismiss Kennedy and his outlandish claims this week as the ravings of a madman. But a raving madman does not become Secretary of HHS, controlling approximately 25 percent of the federal budget, without an underlying objective process creating the conditions for that to happen. It takes a society controlled by an insane ruling elite to put such a figure in charge of public health.

That objective process, which put Kennedy in position to peddle anti-science as science, is the intensification of the contradictions inherent in the capitalist system. As the global productive forces clash with national barriers, the ruling class increasingly is desperate to keep the capitalist system afloat. That has set the conditions for clawing back all working class gains of the 20th century, including the extraordinary improvements in health and life expectancy.

Kennedy’s role is to sow doubt in the scientific underpinnings of the modern healthcare and public health systems to justify stripping them of hundreds of billions of dollars to enrich the financial oligarchy and prop up their teetering economic system.

The working class must cut through the maelstrom of misinformation deliberately being hurled at it, organize its own independent political program, and replace the capitalist system with a system that among other things, puts human health above profit.



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