

Rescinding COVID-19 vaccine recommendations, RFK Jr. escalates assault on science and public health

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The tenure of anti-vaxxer Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Trump's Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) continues to unleash a frontal assault on science, medicine and the public health infrastructure of the United States.

With COVID-19 still an ongoing global threat—as shown by the recent wave of infections and hospitalizations in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan due to the new NB.1.8.1 variant—Kennedy's policies are not only dangerously anti-scientific. They are calculated to deepen social inequality and accelerate mass death, in order to drive down the life expectancy of the working class and funnel billions from social programs into the pockets of the rich.

On Tuesday, Kennedy, flanked by Food and Drug Administration (FDA) head Marty Makary and National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Jay Bhattacharya, announced that he “couldn't be more pleased” that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would no longer recommend COVID-19 vaccinations for healthy children over the age of 6 months as well as healthy pregnant women. The decision was made without consultation with the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the expert panel which typically sets vaccine recommendations after a careful review of research data.

While vaccines against COVID-19 are still recommended for children and women with underlying health conditions, it is unclear if those shots will continue to be covered by government healthcare programs or private insurance. The loss of coverage, meaning it would be necessary to pay out of pocket, would put vaccines out of reach for the poor.

Kennedy's announcement was aimed at further undermining confidence in the vaccines, which have been delivered in billions of doses globally and have saved tens of millions of lives. Research has shown that the shots developed in the first year of the pandemic, two of which from Pfizer and Moderna successfully deployed revolutionary mRNA technology, have immense health benefits with minimal side effects.

The removal of guidance protecting society's most vulnerable—infants and expectant mothers—from COVID-19 will condemn countless lives to suffering and death. The consequences of undermining access to and public trust in vaccines will be disastrous. Mass vaccination campaigns aimed at eradicating an array of diseases, including measles, smallpox and polio, were one of the great advances for humanity in the 20th century. Now diseases like measles are making a resurgence in the US under Kennedy at the helm of public health.

On Wednesday, Moderna announced that HHS is pulling millions of dollars in research funding it had pledged to give the company to develop an mRNA vaccine to protect against the H5N1 “bird flu” in humans. HHS spokesman Andrew Nixon justified the decision with the false claim that “mRNA technology remains under-tested.” This takes place under conditions in which numerous scientists have warned that H5N1, which historically has a 50 percent fatality rate among humans, requires only one mutation to develop the capacity for human-to-human transmission.

Kennedy's other anti-science initiatives at HHS include a threat to ban federally funded scientists from publishing in preeminent, peer-reviewed medical journals, including *The Lancet*, the *New England*

Journal of Medicine and *JAMA*, which he denounced as “corrupt”; seeking to block the culling of a herd of ostriches in Canada which tested positive for bird flu after proposing to let the disease spread freely in the United States; and boosting “alternative” treatments for measles and the “healers” who deploy them, including a doctor who appeared on video with a measles infection while treating sick patients.

An official Make American Healthy Again (MAHA) report presented by Kennedy to Trump last week was found to have cited fake sources and mis-cited others. The report denounces the “overmedicalization of our kids,” taking specific aim at the childhood vaccine schedule, along with medications commonly used to treat depression and anxiety, which Kennedy has falsely claimed are behind rising rates of autism and other developmental disorders.

This week, Kennedy also joined forces with Argentina’s fascist President Javier Milei, forming a reactionary bloc aimed at dismantling the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO—from which Trump withdrew on his first day in office—has become a target for these forces precisely because it embodies a framework of international scientific cooperation.

Among the most dangerous elements of this campaign is the drive to promote the debunked “Wuhan lab leak” conspiracy theory. Designed to stoke anti-Chinese sentiment and prepare the population for war against Beijing, while deflecting responsibility for its catastrophic mishandling of the pandemic, the Wuhan Lab Lie has become official dogma of the Trump administration and is accepted without criticism by the Democratic Party and the mainstream press.

This falsehood has already served as the pretext for an ongoing right-wing offensive against public research institutions. The attacks on virologist Peter Dazsak and EcoHealth Alliance—subjected to a McCarthyite inquisition in Congress—paved the way for the latest stage in the attack on public health.

This fascistic propaganda campaign coincides with the Trump administration’s renewed efforts to defund Harvard and other universities, now centered on the attack on international students. On Wednesday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced plans to “aggressively” revoke the visas of students from China.

The scientific community, however, is beginning to fight back. Last week, dozens of NIH staffers walked

out in protest of Bhattacharya’s declaration of support for the Wuhan Lab Lie, with dozens more cheering on their colleagues. This action, while limited, signals a growing recognition among scientists that the defense of truth, public health and life itself requires political resistance. Legitimate scientists understand what is at stake: not merely their careers, but the health of society, the integrity of science and the lives of millions.

Scientists cannot fight back alone. Only one force has the capacity to halt the descent into capitalist barbarism: the international working class. The knowledge and commitment of scientists, researchers, public health officials and academics must be fused with the organized power of workers across every industry and continent.

Science must not serve profit or nationalism—It must serve humanity. To achieve this, it must be freed from the grip of the capitalist class. That means building a socialist movement—international, revolutionary and rooted in the working class—to overthrow a system that sees death as a means of piling up wealth and deploys ignorance as a political weapon.



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