

# Gunman opens fire on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Benjamin Mateus  
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On Friday afternoon, August 8, 2025, the Trump administration's war on public health led to deadly violence. An assault by a distraught gunman on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) headquarters in Atlanta terrorized hundreds of employees, claimed the life of a police officer, and laid bare the lethal consequences of years of political incitement, institutional dismantling, and the deliberate spread of anti-vaccine propaganda. This was not an isolated act of violence. It was the result of a long campaign that attacked scientists, cut resources, and created a climate where lies led to bullets.

The shooter, 30-year-old Patrick Joseph White of Kennesaw, Georgia, arrived with five guns, including at least one long gun, and two backpacks filled with ammunition, some legally obtained by his father, who told officers his son was suicidal and had blamed the COVID vaccines for his mental health condition. After guards stopped him from entering the secure CDC campus, White crossed the street to a CVS and opened fire at the agency's buildings. Dozens of bullets lodged in at least four CDC structures while shattered glass lay strewn across the premises. Those at the scene recall that rapid gunfire echoed for roughly 15 minutes while CDC employees barricaded behind doors lay on the floor as they waited for SWAT teams to arrive. One staff member later described herself as a "sitting duck," while another called it "a miracle more people weren't hit." Shell casings littered the sidewalks.

When police reached the CVS, they found White dead on the second floor. It remains unclear whether he died by suicide or police gunfire. Among the responding officers was DeKalb County Police Officer David Rose, a 33-year-old rookie and former Marine, who was killed in the ensuing gunfire. According to local media, the deceased officer leaves behind two

young children and his wife, who is expecting another child.

Investigators soon learned that White believed the COVID-19 vaccine had made him depressed and suicidal. Neighbors described him as "unsettled" and consumed by anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, convinced that vaccines were harming him and others. His fixation reflects the toll of the sustained campaign of disinformation by the quacks and charlatans that Trump has now placed in positions of authority in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Since the pandemic began, scientists and health officials have endured death threats, armed protests, doxing, and assaults at their homes. These attacks have not emerged in a vacuum but have been fueled and legitimized by political figures, none more prominent than Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Long before taking office, Kennedy called the CDC a "cesspool of corruption" and a "fascist enterprise," compared vaccination programs to the Catholic Church's child sex abuse cover-up, falsely claimed the COVID-19 vaccine was "the deadliest vaccine ever made," and described vaccinating children against COVID-19 as "criminal medical malpractice."

Since assuming office, Kennedy has moved from inflammatory rhetoric to concrete actions that have gutted public health capacity. Most recently he canceled nearly \$500 million in federal funding for mRNA vaccine research, undermining decades of scientific progress. He has also fired all 17 members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and replaced them with anti-vaccine advocates, laid off nearly 2,000 CDC employees, and proposed a fiscal year 2026 budget that would cut the agency's funding in half. He has also threatened to dismantle the

entire US Preventive Taskforce panel, which will have long-term dire consequences. Critics argue that these actions have systematically dismantled the CDC's ability to monitor, respond to, and mitigate disease outbreaks, while sending a chilling message to the remaining workforce.

In the aftermath of the shooting, CDC employees joined internal calls to demand answers about how the agency would address “the misinformation—the disinformation—that caused this issue” and what would be done to protect staff in the future. Former Surgeon General Jerome Adams said employees contacted him directly because they “felt under attack” and wanted someone with a public voice to condemn the violence. CDC Chief Medical Officer Debra Houry voiced a shared sentiment, “We’re mad this has happened.”

Kennedy’s own heedless response to the shooting has only deepened outrage. For more than 18 hours after the shooting, he said nothing publicly, instead posting fishing trip photos on his personal social media. When a statement finally came, it was viewed by many employees as “tepid and inadequate.”

Among Kennedy’s most vocal critics is Fired But Fighting, a group of former HHS employees terminated under his leadership. In a blistering statement, they directly tied the shooting to the administration’s political agenda and called for Kennedy’s resignation alongside that of OMB Director Russell Vought, an architect of Project 2025:

“The armed attack on CDC today, which claimed the life of a heroic police officer and left CDC workers devastated and traumatized, reflects the realization of Vought’s directive: *‘When [federal workers] wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work, because they are increasingly viewed as the villains ... We want to put them in trauma.’* Kennedy is directly responsible for the villainization of CDC’s workforce through his continuous lies about science and vaccine safety, which have fueled a climate of hostility and mistrust. The ongoing destruction of our public health infrastructure has destroyed the systems meant to prevent tragedies like this from happening.”

Scientists who have spoken out are right to see this shooting not as the random act of a “lone madman,” but as the predictable result of a long, deliberate attack on science through both rhetoric and policy. The evidence is clear: between March 2020 and January

2021, more than half of local health departments reported harassment of their staff, and many public health leaders have been driven to resign or retire under threat, leaving communities without the expertise they depend on.

To push back, scientists and public health workers need to organize their protests alongside the working class as a whole, linking their fight to defend science with the fight to protect the health and safety of all working people. The false divide between public health professionals and the working people they serve has only made it easier for these attacks to intensify—and closing that gap is essential to defending both medical science and the lives it protects.

Clearly, the bipartisan war on public health, marked by mass firings, budget cuts, and the elevation of conspiracy theories, is more than administrative policy. It amounts to what can only be called “social murder”—the intentional dismantling of life-saving infrastructure and the normalization of preventable deaths as an acceptable cost of protecting profits and increasing military spending. In this logic, eliminating inconvenient evidence of ongoing health crises becomes a political necessity.

What happened on August 8 was the direct outcome of a political agenda vilifying public health and the people who work in it. If this fascistic climate is left unchallenged, there will be more attacks, more lives lost, and further erosion of the institutions that protect public health. The shooting at the CDC stands as a warning that the attack on Friday was a direct result of the rhetoric, policies, and calculated indifference of those who have chosen to make public health a target.



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