

A coup against science: Kennedy tries to push out CDC director, four other public health officials resign

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In the starker expression of his war against science and public health, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has demanded the resignation of the director of the Centers for Disease Control, career scientist Susan Monarez, triggering the resignation in protest by four other high-level public health officials.

Monarez has been threatened with firing less than one month after being sworn in following her confirmation by the Senate. She reportedly objected to Kennedy's plans to downplay and even suppress critical vaccines, a conflict that reached its peak at a meeting Monday, at which Kennedy reportedly told her to resign or be fired "for not supporting President Trump's agenda," as one participant in the meeting told the *Washington Post*.

In a show of solidarity, four other longtime public health leaders tendered their resignations. These include Dr. Debra Houry, the CDC's chief medical officer; Dr. Demetre Daskalakis, director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases; Dr. Daniel Jernigan, the director of the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases; and Dr. Jen Layden, director of the Office of Public Health Data, Surveillance and Technology.

Monarez's attorneys, Mark Zaid and Abbe David Lowell, said in a statement: "When CDC Director Susan Monarez refused to rubber-stamp unscientific, reckless directives and fire dedicated health experts, she chose protecting the public over serving a political agenda. For that, she has been targeted. This is not about one official. It is about the systematic dismantling of public health institutions, the silencing of experts, and the dangerous politicization of science. The attack on Dr. Monarez is a warning to every American: our evidence-based systems are being undermined from within."

Dr. Houry sent a message to her staff that "ongoing changes" prevent her from continuing in her job. "Vaccines save lives—this is an indisputable, well-established, scientific fact," Houry wrote. "Recently, the overstating of risks and

the rise of misinformation have cost lives, as demonstrated by the highest number of U.S. measles cases in 30 years and the violent attack on our agency."

She was referring to the attack on CDC headquarters in Atlanta by a right-wing gunman, under the influence of fascist propaganda against the COVID vaccine. The gunman, Patrick Joseph White, shot and killed an Atlanta policeman and riddled the outer walls of CDC buildings with gunfire, before taking his own life.

The politically-driven bloodbath in the public health agency is a direct consequence of Trump's appointment of Kennedy, an anti-vaccine activist and conspiracy theorist, to head the Department of Health and Human Services, along with a group of fellow opponents of public health science, such as Dr. Jay Battacharya, who now heads the National Institutes of Health.

A top adviser to Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" (MAHA) Action group, British cardiologist Dr. Aseem Malhotra, raised alarms across the medical community when he suggested that COVID-19 mRNA vaccines could be pulled from the U.S. market within months, even as the country endures its eleventh wave of the pandemic and braces for a winter surge. Scientists warn that such a move would strip away one of the most important public health tools available.

The White House insists no such policy is in place, but the facts point in the opposite direction. Kennedy has already canceled \$500 million in federal mRNA research, gutted the CDC's vaccine advisory committee and replaced its experts with anti-vaccine ideologues, rolled back vaccine guidance for children and pregnant women, and forced out more than 20,000 HHS employees, including thousands of scientists. His administration has also cut U.S. funding to Gavi, the global vaccine alliance—a decision projected to cause over a million preventable child deaths. Medical organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

(ACOG) have openly defied Kennedy, continuing to recommend vaccination, only to be attacked by him as corrupt mouthpieces for “Big Pharma.” Against this backdrop, assurances from the White House that mRNA vaccines are not in danger of removal ring hollow.

Still, in an unprecedent show of courage, scientists and public health workers have indeed weighed in, calling for action and signing petitions to address concerns regarding current U.S. health policy. Specifically, ecologist and pandemic expert Peter Daszak posted a petition by six Nobel Laureates and 27 members of the US National Academies on his social media demanding the resignation of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. from HHS. In their petition they specifically state in no uncertain terms their concerns.

They write, “We, the undersigned clinicians, scientists, and public health workers, call for the immediate resignation or removal of Health and Human Services Secretary, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Mr. Kennedy poses an immediate and long-term threat to the health of the American public.” Furthermore, “[He has] repeatedly and aggressively disregarded the consensus view of the scientific community [and] dismissed experts from review committees without grounds.” They added, “[He has] hired or given influential positions to people whose viewpoints aligned with his own despite no directly relevant expertise. [He has] defunded critical research without scientific justification … including banning mRNA research, which is described as ‘the most promising vaccine technology in decades’ and having ‘saved millions of lives during the pandemic.’”

After citing the complete decimation of prestigious bodies within the scientific body, they concluded that Kennedy’s actions would “lead to increases in death and disease” and that his use of the HHS Secretary’s “megaphone…to promote unfounded health advice and misinformation with a particular focus on vaccines” will lead to “a deadly loss of confidence in vaccines.”

Also, in the aftermath of the shooting at CDC headquarters in Atlanta, hundreds of current and former staff members from the CDC, HHS and National Institutes of Health (NIH) collectively wrote a letter to Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and members of Congress warning that “the violent August 8th attack on CDC’s headquarters in Atlanta was not random” and came amid growing mistrust driven by politicized rhetoric. The federal health workers accused Kennedy of being “complicit in dismantling America’s public health infrastructure and endangering the nation’s health by repeatedly spreading inaccurate health information.”

These charges and protests come at an important juncture for public health, when the removal of the COVID mRNA vaccines are coinciding with the fall and winter waves of the

ongoing pandemic. The Pandemic Mitigation Collaborative (PMC) Model report from August 11, 2025 indicates that the “11th wave is in full swing,” with COVID-19 transmission currently “rising” and presently higher than during most of the ongoing pandemic.

According to August 11, 2025 PMC report, an estimated one in 93 people are actively infectious in the US. The nation is experiencing approximately 3.6 million new weekly infections, translating to an estimated 500,000 new daily infections, and this before the return to school for pre-K through university/college students and faculty, which number in the tens of millions. These projected infection levels will result in 180,000-720,000 Long COVID cases and 1,300-2,100 excess deaths in the US.

Additionally, concerns about Kennedy’s cancellation of \$500 million in mRNA vaccine research for respiratory illnesses like COVID and flu goes even beyond infectious disease. Oncologists warn that the cuts could derail some of the most promising cancer breakthroughs in decades. mRNA vaccines are already showing striking results in treatment of various cancers. For instance, Moderna and Merck’s melanoma vaccine, mRNA-4157/V940, cut recurrence or death risk by nearly 50 percent in trials and reduced metastasis by over 60 percent, with Phase three trials underway.

The measures under Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s HHS amount to nothing less than a coup against science. Mass firings, gutted budgets, the weaponization of statistics, and the elevation of anti-vaccine operatives have hollowed out federal health agencies and crippled basic functions. Surveillance programs are being cut, vaccine research dismantled, and international aid withdrawn—policies that experts warn will cost millions of lives. This is not reform, but the deliberate dismantling of systems built over generations to protect the public. Workers must understand that what is being destroyed is more than vaccination programs or pandemic preparedness. It is science itself as a social institution—the very capacity to generate knowledge and defend society against disease. The assault on public health is inseparable from the wider attack on truth, expertise and collective protections.



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