

# Kennedy's firing of CDC director: A coup against science and public health

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The firing of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Susan Monarez on Wednesday evening, coupled with the immediate resignation of four high-level public health officials in protest, represents a dramatic escalation of the Trump administration's war against science and public health. This coordinated assault is unfolding as the United States is now in the midst of the 11th wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, while Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. is moving to entirely ban COVID-19 vaccines.

On Thursday afternoon, hundreds of CDC employees and supporters staged a walkout outside the agency's Atlanta headquarters in a powerful show of solidarity with the ousted officials. Current and former CDC staff members marched, held signs and applauded as three senior leaders who had resigned in protest—Chief Medical Officer Deb Houry, Dan Jernigan and Demetre Daskalakis—were escorted from the building by security personnel.

In their resignation letters, these officials explicitly condemned the “weaponizing of public health” and the “politicization” of scientific decision-making, while Houry remarked that the CDC leadership had “reached a tipping point.”

The events of Wednesday began with a tense confrontation Monday in Kennedy's Washington office, where he and his principal deputy chief of staff Stefanie Spear demanded Monarez either resign or comply with two ultimatums: accept all recommendations from the agency's vaccine advisory committee, whose members Kennedy had replaced with hand-picked allies hostile to childhood immunizations, and fire a number of high-level officials at the agency. When Monarez refused both demands and to “rubber-stamp unscientific, reckless directives,” Kennedy moved swiftly to remove her.

On the same day as her firing, Kennedy announced new restrictions that fundamentally alter COVID-19 vaccine access, requiring that all Americans receive a doctor's recommendation in order to receive a vaccine. For the vast majority of Americans, this effectively means they will lose access to COVID-19 vaccines without taking inordinate and

in many cases prohibitive measures. Furthermore, multiple sources report that Kennedy is planning to fully revoke access to mRNA COVID-19 vaccines within months.

The timing of these actions is particularly ominous. They coincide with the 11th wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an estimated 1 in 93 Americans now actively infectious. Over 4 million Americans are now likely being infected each week. This surge is proceeding with virtually no mainstream media coverage or public health reporting. This information blackout coincides with the planned elimination of mRNA vaccines just as the winter respiratory virus season approaches, leaving the population totally unprotected against a pathogen that continues to evolve into new, potentially more dangerous variants.

In addition, the purging of the CDC's leadership comes less than three weeks after the August 8 attack on CDC headquarters by Patrick Joseph White, who was motivated by anti-vaccine disinformation that Kennedy has spent decades promoting. White fired over 180 rounds at the CDC campus, driven by his belief that COVID-19 vaccines had harmed him and others. In the aftermath, traumatized CDC employees have reported receiving harassing phone calls featuring gunfire sounds, while Trump has said nothing about the violent attack.

The ouster of Monarez completes Kennedy's consolidation of control over the nation's premier public health agency. He now has free rein to implement the most sweeping attacks on vaccines and public health that he has been plotting with Trump and the fascistic anti-vaccine networks in his orbit.

Since assuming office, Kennedy has overseen the termination of over 20,000 federal public health workers at all Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies, with 2,400 at the CDC alone. He has systematically purged vaccine advisory committees, firing all 17 members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and replacing them with eight vaccine skeptics, none of whom are immunologists or epidemiologists.

Kennedy's attacks on mRNA vaccines, one of the most

revolutionary medical technologies in human history, represent perhaps the most devastating blow to pandemic preparedness and medical innovation. These vaccines have proven extraordinarily safe and effective, preventing millions of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cancellation of \$500 million in mRNA vaccine research has terminated 22 critical projects aimed at developing vaccines for avian flu and other emerging threats.

Beyond infectious disease prevention, mRNA technology is showing great promise in cancer treatment. Moderna and Merck's personalized mRNA cancer vaccine has demonstrated remarkable efficacy against melanoma, reducing cancer recurrence risk by 49 percent and metastasis risk by 62 percent in Phase 2 trials.

These attacks on science and public health occur alongside the broader social devastation being unleashed by the Trump administration, whose underlying aim is to lower life expectancy and eliminate all social spending. Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill" will drive insurance premiums higher, while millions more lose access to Medicare and Medicaid coverage. Families are being forced to reduce food purchases as tariffs increase the cost of basic necessities.

Kennedy may be a particularly deranged individual, but his anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and reactionary policies have a very definite basis in social relations and serve specific class interests. His attacks on science provide ideological cover for the systematic dismantling of social programs and public health infrastructure demanded by the financial oligarchy. The apparent irrationality of Kennedy's positions masks their rationality from the standpoint of a ruling class determined to eliminate all social spending that does not directly serve capital accumulation.

From the mid-19th century on, spectacular gains were made in public health, sanitation, workplace safety and social welfare. A deliberate reversal of these achievements has been underway for decades, vastly accelerated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has now killed upwards of 30 million people and debilitated hundreds of millions more with Long COVID globally. The daily barrage of the Trump administration's counterrevolutionary policies amount to an endlessly mutating political pandemic, intersecting with and reinforcing the COVID-19 pandemic's destructive impact on human civilization.

The silence of the Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO in response to the Trump administration's war on science and public health is deafening. Rather than mobilizing opposition, they have remained largely silent, reflecting their own complicity in the broader attack on social programs and scientific institutions.

Kennedy's attacks on vaccines and public health flow

logically from the policies initiated under the Biden administration, which systematically undermined COVID-19 vaccine access and denigrated protective measures after ending the Public Health Emergency in May 2023. The Biden administration terminated federal vaccine mandates, ended free testing requirements for private insurers, and began transitioning COVID-19 vaccines to the commercial market. Trump and Kennedy have qualitatively deepened these attacks, but they build upon the foundation laid by Biden's surrender to corporate interests that demanded an end to pandemic restrictions regardless of public health consequences.

Significant opposition is emerging among scientists and healthcare workers to Kennedy's attacks on public health. A petition demanding his resignation has garnered over 1,000 signatures from clinicians, scientists and public health professionals, including four Nobel Prize laureates. The petition denounces Kennedy as posing "an immediate and long-term threat to the health of the American public" through his "profound misunderstanding of science coupled with a failure to grasp his own limitations."

The Thursday demonstration at CDC headquarters represents a significant escalation of this opposition, with federal employees risking their careers to publicly denounce Kennedy's assault on scientific integrity.

Fundamentally, the attacks on science and public health are aimed at the international working class, which bears the brunt of disease, disability, and early death when protective measures are eliminated. Workers and their children will suffer disproportionately from vaccine-preventable diseases, while wealthy elites will retain access to the highest quality private healthcare that money can buy.

The defense of science and public health cannot be separated from the broader struggle against capitalism and for international socialism, the only progressive path forward for humanity in the face of capitalism's descent into barbarism. Scientists, healthcare workers and all those committed to defending public health must turn to the international working class as the only social force capable of implementing the rational, planned development of society necessary to unleash the full potential of scientific knowledge.



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