



*New Report*

# Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Is An Anti-Vaccine Extremist

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## REPORT: Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Is An Anti-Vaccine Extremist

Recently, Robert F. Kennedy has [attempted](#) to distance himself from his anti-vaccine record, but Americans know the truth. The American Association for the Advancement of Science called that a "[contemptible lie](#)," pointing out that he had "spent years [being exactly that](#)." The Associated Press [found](#) that "the anti-vaccine movement lies at the heart of his [presidential] campaign," and the Bulwark [called](#) Kennedy's anti-vaccine activism, "the hallmark of his career."

Make no mistake: Kennedy has, in fact, built his entire career on anti-vaccine lies, ranging from linking vaccines in general to autism to attacks against all kinds of disease-specific vaccines, chiefly measles, COVID-19, polio, and HPV – all vaccines that have been instrumental in eradicating or curbing the spread of life-threatening, harrowing diseases over the past century. Now, as scientists race towards developing a bird flu vaccine to prevent the next pandemic, an outspoken anti-vaccine extremist is poised to lead the country's vaccine regulation and oversight apparatus while serving as Trump's nominee for Secretary of Health & Human Services. With Kennedy at the helm, American lives are at risk.

### Autism and Vaccines

**Kennedy Has Been A Leading Anti-Vaccine Voice For Decades, Falsely Correlating Vaccines With Autism.** Kennedy's anti-vaccine [conspiracy theories](#) date back decades. In 2005 Kennedy [wrote](#) an article for *Rolling Stone* magazine and Salon.com asserting that the government was conspiring to cover up the connections between autism and vaccines. Salon.com later retracted the article because of factual errors, and *Rolling Stone* deleted it. Kennedy once [called](#) vaccination a "Holocaust," repeating his claims about autism and comparing it to genocide. In 2016, he became the chair of Children's Health Defense, a group considered one of the [main sources](#) of misinformation about the supposed dangers of vaccines. As recently as 2023, Kennedy [reportedly](#) told Fox News that he "still believes in the [long-ago debunked idea](#) that vaccines can cause autism." Of course, none of these claims hold up. As the American Association for the Advancement of Science [noted](#), "Suffice it to say that this connection has been investigated thoroughly for many years now, and that no such connection has ever been shown to exist...Kennedy's views on science and medicine are not only wrong, they are actively harmful and destructive."

**Kennedy Says He Accosts Strangers With Babies And Urges Them Not To Vaccinate To "Save" Their Children And That "There's No Vaccine That Is Safe And Effective."** Kennedy [told](#) a [podcast](#) on the "state of health freedom" in 2021 that, "our job is to resist and to talk about [vaccines] to everyone." Kennedy claimed that if he sees someone "on a hiking trail carrying a little baby and I say to him, 'Better not get vaccinated.' And he heard that from me. If he hears it from 10 other people, maybe he won't do it, you know, maybe he will save

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that child.” In a July 2023 appearance on Lex Fridman’s [podcast](#), when pressed on whether he is opposed to all vaccines, Kennedy said, “There’s no vaccine that is safe and effective.” As recently as July 2023, Kennedy was promoting the false idea that vaccines cause autism [telling](#) Fox News, “I do believe that autism comes from vaccines.” During the same [podcast](#), Kennedy also urged people to “resist” CDC guidelines on when kids should get vaccines.”

### Measles

**83 People Died In A Measles Epidemic In Samoa After Kennedy Helped Fuel A Wave Of Vaccine Hesitancy.** In 2019, Kennedy [visited](#) Samoa at the invitation of a local anti-vaccine influencer. At the time the island nation was attempting to get its vaccination program back on track after two children died following a nurse’s error in mixing measles vaccines. Kennedy met with the Samoan prime minister and prominent local anti-vaccine activists. A few months later, a measles epidemic broke out in Samoa, killing 83 people, mostly infants and children.

**Kennedy Claimed That The Global Decline In Measles Cases Was Caused By “Nutrition And Clean Water, Not The Vaccine” And Questioned Whether The MMR Vaccine Is Necessary At All.** In a 2019 [address](#) to Texans for Vaccine Choice shortly before his trip to Samoa, Kennedy discussed the cause of the global decline in measles outbreaks. “The drop in measles occurred before the vaccine was introduced,” Kennedy said “The thing that cured measles was nutrition and clean water, not the vaccine.” Kennedy questioned whether the MMR vaccine was necessary since tuberculosis and scurvy had been largely eradicated through similar methods without vaccines and he warned parents that pharmaceutical companies are “trying to get at your baby and force him to take their vaccines. And give him a lifetime dependency.”

**RFK Jr.’s Siblings Warned That His Anti-Vaccine Advocacy Was Spurring Global Outbreaks Of The Measles And Calling Him “Tragically Wrong About Vaccines.”** In May 2019, shortly before his trip to Samoa, two of RFK Jr’s siblings and a niece authored an op-ed in *Politico* [denouncing](#) RFK Jr.’s anti-vaccine advocacy as dangerous: “The World Health Organization reports a 300 percent increase in the numbers of measles cases around the world this year compared with the first three months of 2018. More than 110,000 people are now dying from measles every year. The WHO, the health arm of the United Nations, has listed vaccine hesitancy as one of the top 10 threats to global health in 2019. Most cases of preventable diseases occur among unvaccinated children, because parents have chosen not to vaccinate, have delayed vaccination, have difficulty accessing vaccines, or the children were too young to receive the vaccines. These tragic numbers are caused by the growing fear and mistrust of vaccines—amplified by internet doomsayers. Robert F. Kennedy Jr.—Joe and Kathleen’s brother and Maeve’s uncle—is part of this campaign to attack the institutions committed to reducing the tragedy of preventable infectious diseases. He has helped to spread dangerous misinformation over social media and is complicit in sowing distrust of the science behind vaccines.”

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**In The Middle Of A Measles Outbreak In Minnesota’s Somali-American Community, Kennedy Told Parents That “Africans and African Americans May Be Particularly Vulnerable To Vaccine Injuries, Including Autism.”** In 2017, amid a measles outbreak that was [devastating](#) Minnesota’s Somali-American community due to low vaccination rates, Kennedy continued to [push](#) his false claims that “science and anecdotal evidence suggest that Africans and African Americans may be particularly vulnerable to vaccine injuries including autism.”

**During A Measles Outbreak In Southern California, Kennedy Falsely Claimed Nearly Half Of The Cases Came From The Vaccine Strain Of Measles – But No Outbreaks From The Vaccine Strain Of Measles Have Ever Been Recorded.** During a 2015 Measles outbreak in Anaheim, California, Kennedy [lied](#) about the outbreak supposedly being caused by vaccines, telling a crowd, “Where is the measles coming from in the Disneyland outbreak? 39 percent of the kids who got measles got vaccine strain measles. What does that mean? It means they got it from the vaccine or they got it from somebody who got the vaccine.” In reality, there have been [no known breakout cases](#) of the strain of measles used in the vaccine – ever. The CDC [found](#) all genotyped patients in the California outbreak had measles genotype B3, not the live attenuated strain used in the vaccine. Kennedy pulled those numbers out of thin air.

**Kennedy Said That It Was A “Great Week” When He And His Siblings Had Measles And That Big Pharma Developed The MMR Vaccine To Create Lifetime Customers For Chronic Illnesses Caused By The Vaccine.** In a 2021 interview with the Mikhaila Peterson [podcast](#) RFK Jr. said, “They are a rogue, outlaw industry that is making... And you know, listen, if they give you a measles vaccine... Listen, I had the measles when I was a kid. I had 11 brothers and sisters. We all got measles. It was a great week. We stayed home. We watched [inaudible]. We got soup. What is the cure for measles? The treatment for measles, it’s chicken soup and vitamin A. You can’t patent those. So pharma was seeing all these people who are sick and making no money. But if they give you an MMR vaccine and now one in every couple thousand people get the seizures and one in every thousand of them now has lifetime epilepsy, you now have a customer for life who’s paying a lot of money for chronic disease.”

- **Kennedy Said Measles, Mumps, And Chicken Pox Were “Self Limiting” And “Gone” After A Week, But Chronic Diseases Caused By Vaccines Are Causing People To Become “Addicted” To Pharmaceutical Treatments.** Kennedy [said](#) on the Mikhaila Peterson podcast, “Every one of these childhood diseases – mumps, measles, chickenpox – were self-limiting. In other words, after a week they’re gone and they were all treatable. None of the chronic diseases that are caused by the vaccines are self-limiting. They’re treatable, the symptoms are treatable, but you’re addicted.”

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**Kennedy Called The COVID-19 Vaccine “A Crime Against Humanity.”** Kennedy has [called](#) the COVID-19 vaccine “a crime against humanity” and falsely [claimed](#) that it is the “deadliest vaccine ever made.” Kennedy [reportedly](#) claimed that the U.S.’s high vaccination rates corresponded to it also having one of the highest rates of death from COVID-19 in the world. Yet as Voices for Vaccines [found](#), “none of which is true. The United States is 47th on the list of the percentage of its citizens with at least one vaccine. That’s about 25% of the world’s countries more vaccinated than the US. The US was also 14th on the list of rates of death from COVID. Many of the countries with very high vaccination rates were some of those with the lowest mortality rates, such as Qatar and Vietnam. While some of the countries with the lowest vaccination rates, like Bulgaria, have some of the highest mortality rates.” Kennedy also authored the foreword to a book [riddled](#) with false claims that the vaccines had caused a spike in sudden deaths among healthy young people. Experts have estimated that vaccination against COVID-19 saved at least [14.4 million lives](#) worldwide in 2021 alone.

**Kennedy Targeted Dangerous And Disproven Anti-Vaccine Propaganda At The Black Community During COVID-19.** For years, Kennedy has targeted a particularly dangerous form of vaccine denial at the Black community. Richard Allen Williams, founder of the Association of Black Cardiologists and former president of the National Medical Association [called](#) Kennedy’s Children’s Health Defense “absolutely a racist operation” that is particularly dangerous to the Black community. In a 2020 [interview](#), Kennedy also asserted without evidence that “People with African blood react differently to vaccines than people with Caucasian blood. They’re much more sensitive.” In 2021 at the height of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, Kennedy [released](#) a film called *Medical Racism*, which promoted [disproven](#) claims about the dangers of vaccines and explicitly warned communities of color to be suspicious of “sinister” vaccination campaigns. Several doctors and experts who participated in the film later [denounced](#) it and said they felt used and misled about the message of the documentary. He also recorded a [webinar](#) encouraging Black people to be skeptical of vaccines claiming, “There has been abundant evidence... beyond any dispute that Blacks are disproportionately harmed by vaccine injury,” and adding, “Blacks react completely differently to vaccines... we now know it’s just one huge experiment on Black Americans, and they know what is happening and they are doing nothing.”

## Polio

**July 2023: RFK Jr. Spread Conspiracy Theories That The Polio Vaccine “Cause[d] More Death Than It Avert[ed].”** During a July 2023 [interview](#) with Lex Fridman, when asked about the polio vaccine, Kennedy launched into a conspiracy-laden tirade: “Well, here’s the problem. Here’s the problem. Yeah, here’s the problem. The polio vaccine contained a virus called simian virus 40. SV40. It’s one of the most carcinogenic materials that is known to man. In fact, it’s used now by scientists around the world to induce tumors and rats and Guinea pigs in labs. But it was in that vaccine, 98 million people who got that vaccine. And my generation got

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it. And now you've had this explosion of soft tissue cancers in our generation that killed many, many, many more people than polio ever did. [...] If you say to me, 'Did it cause more death than it averted?' I would say, 'I don't know, because we don't have the data on that.'" Kennedy's organization, Children's Health Defense, also spread [false reports](#) calling into question the safety and necessity of polio vaccinations during a 2022 resurgence in the virus. A large study [conducted](#) in the late 1990s [concluded](#) that the virus-contaminated vaccine was not associated with an increased rate of numerous cancers.

- **Kennedy Started A False Conspiracy Theory That Nearly 500,000 Indian Children Were Paralyzed In A Polio Vaccine Trial.** Kennedy is the originator of a [debunked](#) conspiracy theory that the Gates Foundation paralyzed 496,000 children in India during a polio vaccine trial. As AFP Fact Check found, "The claims appear to trace back to one point made in a lengthy April 7 Instagram [post](#) by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nephew of former US president John F. Kennedy and a leader of the World Mercury Project, which advocates against mandatory vaccination. He wrote: "Indian doctors blame the Gates campaign for a devastating vaccine-strain polio epidemic that paralyzed 496,000 children between 2000 and 2017." His post was copied and reposted across Facebook, including [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)."

**One Of Kennedy's Top Advisors Petitioned To Have The Polio Vaccine Taken Off The Market In 2022.** Aaron Siri, an attorney helping RFK Jr. staff the Department of Health and Human Services petitioned the government in 2022 to revoke approval of the polio vaccine. Siri has also sought to pause the distribution of 13 other vaccines; sued federal agencies for the disclosure of records related to vaccine approvals; and subjected prominent vaccine scientists to grueling videotaped depositions. According to [reporting](#) in the *New York Times*, Siri has joined RFK Jr. in questioning and choosing candidates for top health positions and they have asked candidates about their views on vaccines. Kennedy reportedly wants Siri to serve as general counsel at HHS and he also served as Kennedy's attorney during his presidential campaign.

**Kennedy Falsely Claimed That Polio's Eradication Was Not Due To The Vaccine.** As the *New York Times* [reported](#), Kennedy said in 2020, "The proposition and the theology that smallpox and polio were abolished due to vaccination is controversial. That is not a proposition that is universally accepted." During the same interview, Kennedy asserted that the decline in deaths from infectious diseases "during the first half of the 20th century had virtually nothing to do with vaccines. It had everything to do with sanitation, with hygiene, electric refrigerators, with reduction in population densities." But as Dr. Walter Orenstein, a health policy expert who ran immunization programs for the C.D.C. in the late 1980s and 1990s noted, "That polio disappeared without a vaccine is just wrong."

HPV

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**Kennedy Has Filed Multiple Lawsuits Alleging That The HPV Vaccine Is Unsafe And Can Cause A “Cascade Of Debilitating Autoimmune Diseases.”** As of 2022, Kennedy has [filed at least six lawsuits](#) against Merck, the manufacturer of the HPV vaccine Gardasil, on [behalf](#) of [several children](#) who had side effects from taking the vaccine through his [law firm](#) Wisner Baum and nonprofit Children’s Health Defense. While Children’s Health Defense served as a plaintiff, Kennedy even [led a nearly hour-long](#) presentation against Gardasil. The lawsuits are based on a set of misinformed beliefs and scare tactics Kennedy has been deploying for years. In 2019, Kennedy [published](#) a lengthy article through Children’s Health Defense railing against the HPV vaccine. He pushed false claims that the vaccine contains autism-causing toxins. Kennedy also [falsely claimed](#) that there was a link between vaccines and autoimmune diseases like postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS): “Mainstream media is finally taking notice of link [sic] between vaccines and this cascade of debilitating autoimmune diseases like POTS. I’m currently representing hundreds of young women and men who got this devastating injury from Gardasil (HPV) vaccines.” During his anti-HVP vaccine campaign, Kennedy [falsely linked](#) the HPV vaccine to cervical cancer in Australia and even [blamed](#) the HPV vaccine for a spike in mental health challenges among adolescents, including rising teen anxiety and depression, blaming aluminum present in the vaccine for causing adverse public health outcomes even though experiments have proven definitively that dietary and immunization-based aluminum consumption has no significant impact.

- **Studies Have Shown That The HPV Vaccine Is Incredibly Effective Against Cervical Cancer.** Most sexually active individuals will eventually be infected with HPV. The magnitude of the risk of HPV infection is incredibly high; [over 80 percent](#) of sexually active people will be infected at some point during their lifetime. [10 percent](#) of infected women retain the virus, which can lead to precancerous cervical lesions. [Across the board](#), research shows that the HPV vaccine has been an [essential tool](#) in combatting cervical cancer, with one study showing that the vaccine [stops 90 percent](#) of cervical cancer cases. Another study even found [zero cases](#) of cervical cancer among women vaccinated against the virus before age 14. Researchers also found a [62 percent drop](#) in cervical cancer deaths in young women over the last decade due to HPV vaccination! As Bloomberg columnist Lisa Jarvis [wrote](#), “Imagine if vaccination against HPV (alongside regular screening) eventually allowed the US to cut the 4,000 annual deaths from cervical cancer to zero — or dramatically reduce or even eliminate the nearly 38,000 HPV-related cancers diagnosed in the country each year. [...] These new data drive home the profound impact this vaccine has in preventing unnecessary suffering and deaths from HPV-related cancers. What a colossal shame it would be to go backward — at the cost of women’s lives.”

### Rare Diseases and Vaccines

**Kennedy Has Spread False Claims Linking Flu Shots, Hepatitis B Vaccines, and Even 19th Century Vaccines To Rare Diseases.** Kennedy has blamed vaccines for a host of

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rare diseases. Kennedy has even [suggested](#) that vaccines are used to microchip people without their knowledge. He [falsely claimed](#) that a flu shot caused his spasmodic dysphonia, a neurological disorder that caused changes in his voice in his 40s. Kennedy has also [claimed](#) that the Hepatitis B vaccine is “the most dangerous vaccine.” Earlier this year, Kennedy [falsely claimed](#) that the deadly 1918 “Spanish flu” was caused by vaccines – Meta later suspended his Instagram for spreading vaccine misinformation.

### *Bird Flu*

**Hampering Bird Flu Vaccine Development: Kennedy’s Anti-Vaccine Views, FDA Purge, Planned Research Pause, and Embrace of Raw Milk Could Undermine Efforts To Contain and Prevent The Spread of Bird Flu.** Kennedy’s anti-vaccine views – combined with his [past statements](#) about wanting to “[pause](#)” all drug development and infectious disease research and [purge](#) the FDA – suggest that he would not prioritize the development and deployment of a new bird flu vaccine. If Kennedy [believes](#) his claim that “no vaccine” is “safe and effective,” he may prove to be a hurdle as scientists [race to develop](#) a bird flu vaccine. Humans continue to be infected by the disease from animals like dairy cows, and on Jan. 6, 2025, the CDC [reported](#) the first recorded death from bird flu. Given his [whole-hearted embrace](#) of unpasteurized or “raw” milk products that are [known](#) to [contain](#) and [spread](#) bird flu, Kennedy is already refusing to take the threat of a bird flu pandemic seriously and it is clear that he would be a disastrous pick to lead the nation’s top agency in the midst of a crisis that can only be solved through the rapid development of a vaccine.