

Anti-vaccine RFK Jr. creates vaccine panel of anti-vaccine group's dreams

Immediate concern

It's possible that Kennedy did not immediately set up the task force because the necessary leadership was not in place. The 1986 law says the task force "shall consist of consist of the Director of the National Institutes of Health, the Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, and the Director of the Centers for Disease Control [and Prevention]." But a CDC director was only confirmed and sworn in at the end of July.

With Susan Monarez now at the helm at CDC, the Department of Health and Human Services said Thursday that the task force is being revived, though it will be led by the NIH.

"By reinstating this Task Force, we are reaffirming our commitment to rigorous science, continuous improvement, and the trust of American families," NIH Director Jay Bhattacharya said in the announcement. "NIH is proud to lead this effort to advance vaccine safety and support innovation that protects children without compromise."

Kennedy's anti-vaccine group cheered the move on social media, saying it was "grateful" that Kennedy was fulfilling his duty.

Outside health experts were immediately concerned by the move.

"What I am concerned about is making sure that we don't

overemphasize very small risks [of vaccines] and underestimate the real risk of infectious diseases and cancers that these vaccines help prevent,” Anne Zink, Alaska’s former chief medical officer, told The Washington Post.

David Higgins, a pediatrician and preventive medicine specialist at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, worried about eroding trust in vaccines, telling the Post, “I am concerned that bringing this committee back implies to the public that we have not been looking at vaccine safety. The reality is, we evaluate the safety of vaccines more than any other medication, medical intervention, or supplements available.”

Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, worried about a more direct attack on vaccines, telling CNN, “Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is an anti-vaccine activist who has these fixed, immutable, science-resistant beliefs that vaccines are dangerous. He is in a position now to be able to set up task forces like this one [that] will find some way to support his notion that vaccines are doing more harm than good.”

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