Childhood vaccines safe for a little longer as CDC cancels advisory meeting



An October meeting of a key federal vaccine advisory committee has been canceled without explanation, sparing the evidence-based childhood vaccination schedule from more erosion—at least for now.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was planning to meet on October 22 and 23, which would have been the committee's fourth meeting this year. But the meeting schedule was updated in the past week to remove those dates and replace them with "2025 meeting, TBD."

Ars Technica contacted the Department of Health and Human Services to ask why the meeting was canceled. HHS press secretary Emily Hilliard offered no explanation, only saying that the "official meeting dates and agenda items will be posted on the website once finalized."

ACIP is tasked with publicly reviewing and evaluating the wealth of safety and efficacy data on vaccines and then offering evidence-based recommendations for their use. Once the committee's recommendations are adopted by the CDC, they set national vaccination standards for children and establish which shots federal programs and private insurance companies are required to fully cover.

In the past, the committee has been stacked with highly esteemed, thoroughly vetted medical experts, who diligently conducted their somewhat esoteric work on immunization policy with little fanfare. That changed when ardent anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. became health secretary. In June, Kennedy abruptly and unilaterally fired all 17 ACIP members, falsely accusing them of being riddled with conflicts of interest. He then installed his own hand-selected members. With the exception of one advisor—pediatrician and veteran ACIP member Cody Meissner—the members are poorly qualified, have gone through little vetting, and embrace the same anti-vaccine and dangerous fringe ideas as Kennedy.

Corrupted committee

So far this year, Kennedy's advisors have met twice, producing chaotic meetings during which members revealed a clear lack of understanding of the data at hand and the process of setting vaccine recommendations, all while setting policy decisions long sought by anti-vaccine activists. The first meeting, in June, included seven members selected by Kennedy. In that meeting, the committee rescinded the recommendation for flu vaccines containing a preservative called thimerosal based on false claims from anti-vaccine groups that it causes autism. The panel also ominously said it would re-evaluate the entire childhood vaccination schedule, putting life-saving shots at risk.

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