

US CDC adopts Kennedy's anti-vaccine views on recast website

[Michael Erman](#)

NEW YORK, Nov 20 (Reuters) - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recast the vaccine safety section of its website on Wednesday to align with the view of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. that childhood vaccines cause autism, [countering decades of science](#) showing them to be safe.

The U.S. public health agency's website was changed to say, "The claim 'vaccines do not cause autism' is not an evidence-based claim because studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism."

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It added that health authorities have "ignored" studies supporting the link between the two.

Public health experts, doctors and scientists decried the update as the kind of misinformation the CDC has fought for decades as it promoted the use of life-saving childhood vaccines both in the U.S. and abroad.

Until Kennedy, a longtime anti-vaccine proponent, took up his role as head of Health and Human Services, the CDC was a key opponent of growing global anti-vaccine sentiment. Some of that can be traced to a now discredited 1998 study that linked the measles vaccine and autism. President [Donald Trump](#) has also expressed anti-vaccine sentiments.

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The CDC's website previously said "studies have shown there is no link between receiving vaccines and developing autism spectrum disorder."

The World Health Organization and other health agencies around the world have repeatedly said evidence shows vaccines do not cause autism and referred back to earlier statements when asked about the CDC website change on Thursday.

A REMAKING OF THE CDC

"This represents a new and devastating turn by the CDC, which has been effectively dismantled by the Secretary of HHS," said Helen Tager-Flusberg, an autism expert at Boston

University.

She pointed to the thousands of CDC scientists who were fired or have resigned this year and were replaced by key anti-vaccine proponents such as David Geier, who Kennedy has said is reviewing data.

The website change happened without the consultation of CDC staff who were studying autism, said one CDC scientist who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to reporters.

Andrew Nixon, a spokesperson for HHS, defended the change and did not address questions on who had ordered it.

Kennedy cleared the way for CDC policy changes in August, when he [fired Director Susan Monarez](#) over vaccine policy. The agency is now led by acting director and deputy HHS Secretary Jim O'Neill, who is not a scientist.

Kennedy had already [fired all 17 members](#) of the committee that advises the CDC on vaccine policy and replaced them with his own nominees. That committee is scheduled to meet early next month to consider new recommendations for Hepatitis B vaccines.

Fiona Havers, a former CDC official who resigned in June over vaccine policy, said Kennedy is weaponizing the

agency.

[1/4]The exterior of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S., November 20, 2025. REUTERS/Alyssa Pointer [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

"This is clearly being driven by RFK Jr.'s political appointees, or the 'special advisers' that he has hand-picked and placed at CDC," Havers said, adding that career CDC scientists have been completely sidelined in this process.

VACCINES DO NOT CAUSE AUTISM

Scientists took issue with statements on the website that studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism, arguing that it is "exploiting a quirk of logic."

"You can't prove something never happens," Jake Scott, a professor at Stanford Medical School, wrote on Substack. "Scientists can't prove vaccines never cause autism because proving a universal negative is logically impossible."

The agency kept the header "Vaccines do not cause autism" on its webpage, saying it was not removed due to an agreement with Republican U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

In February, Kennedy secured the endorsement of Cassidy, a

doctor, in part by pledging he would not change the CDC's website language on vaccines and autism.

Jesse Goodman, a former FDA chief scientist, said the website now ignores multiple large, well-done studies that have shown no association of vaccines with autism. The studies it cites "have major flaws and do not control adequately for other factors potentially associated with autism diagnoses," he said.

In particular, he and others cite a large, landmark 2019 Danish study.

The CDC website cites a 2012 review done by the Institute of Medicine as saying that all but four studies of the relationship between the Measles-Mumps-Rubella vaccines and autism had "serious methodological limitations."

It did not include that review's conclusion that the evidence nonetheless favors rejection of a causal relationship between the MMR vaccine and autism.

ANTI-VACCINE GROUP APPLAUDS CHANGES

The anti-vaccine group Children's Health Defense, which was previously led by Kennedy, applauded the changes to the CDC's website.

"The CDC is beginning to acknowledge the truth about this condition that affects millions, disavowing the bold, long-running lie that 'vaccines do not cause autism,'" the group said on X.

Kennedy has [linked vaccines to autism](#) and sought to rewrite the country's immunization policies. The CDC has [dropped recommendations for COVID shots](#) for pregnant women and children and HHS has cut research funding.

Trump has also linked autism to use of [the pain medication Tylenol](#) by pregnant women, a claim also not backed by scientific evidence.

Autism is a neurological and developmental condition marked by disruptions in brain signaling that cause people to behave, communicate, interact and learn in atypical ways.

The [causes of autism](#) are unclear.

Reporting by Rishabh Jaiswal in Bengaluru and Michael Erman in New Jersey; additional reporting by Jennifer Rigby in London, Julie Steenhuisen in Chicago and Ahmed Aboulenein in Washington; Editing by Caroline Humer, Chizu Nomiyama and Bill Berkrot

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