

# US states and medical societies chart new paths forward amid turmoil at CDC and ACIP



US vaccine policy is in disarray. Amid unprecedented turmoil at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), some state governments and medical societies are parting ways with federal immunisation schedules that they see as politicised and at odds with scientific evidence.

On Aug 27, less than 3 weeks after an anti-vaccine gunman attacked CDC headquarters in Atlanta, GA, the White House fired CDC Director Susan Monarez over vaccine policy clashes with US Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F Kennedy, Jr, and installed a Kennedy deputy and loyalist, Jim O'Neill, as acting director. O'Neill has no medical or public health credentials.

Several other top CDC officials resigned in protest, including Chief Medical Officer Debra Houry, citing concerns about data manipulation and political interference under Kennedy, a long-time critic of vaccines. News reports described large-scale staff walkouts and other resignations among the CDC rank and file.

The chaos was the culmination of escalating tensions between Kennedy and CDC officials since he unilaterally announced on social media in May that the CDC would no longer recommend COVID-19 immunisations for healthy children and pregnant women. Kennedy also abruptly sacked all 17 veteran ACIP members, replacing them in June with a handpicked eight-person panel that includes vocal vaccine critics.

After Monarez's firing, Senator Bill Cassidy, a Republican from Louisiana who chairs the Senate's powerful health committee, called for ACIP's Sept 18–19 meeting to be postponed, citing concerns about the panel's plans. Cassidy said that any recommendations made under current

circumstances should be considered invalid. On Sept 4, US lawmakers grilled Kennedy over his vaccine policies at a heated Senate hearing.

On Aug 27, the same day Monarez was fired, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved updated COVID-19 vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech, but restricted eligibility to older people and people with underlying health conditions like asthma, diabetes, or immunosuppression. Healthy children under 5 years are now ineligible for the Pfizer vaccine because the FDA also revoked its emergency use authorisation for this age group, leaving only Moderna's vaccine available for children 6 months to 4 years old who have qualifying health conditions.

Those restrictions and Kennedy's earlier unilateral move to deny COVID-19 vaccines to pregnant women and children were not based on scientific evidence and will lead to more illness and deaths, warned Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association (APHA, Washington, DC, USA). "I do think we're going to see more morbidity and mortality", he said.

Some states are pushing back against eligibility restrictions and pursuing alternatives to ACIP and CDC recommendations. Maine and Illinois plan independent, state immunisation recommendations. Colorado lawmakers passed legislation allowing state health officials to consult medical organisations beyond the CDC, including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Massachusetts, Michigan, and Pennsylvania are considering similar moves and a joint statement in June by the governors of California, Oregon, and Washington state condemned Kennedy's sacking of the ACIP and committed their states

to continued reliance on evidence-based vaccine policies. On Aug 30, New Mexico officials issued a public health order overriding the new FDA eligibility limitations to maintain broad eligibility for COVID-19 immunisation.

The scope and pace of changes to US vaccine policy under Kennedy is unprecedented, according to Jessica Steier (Unbiased Science, Pelham, MA, USA), who recently published an essay in the *New York Times* describing how anti-vaccine activists manipulate data and spread misinformation to link vaccines to autism. "This isn't just about COVID-19 vaccines—the entire child and adult immunisation infrastructure is under threat", Steier told *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*. "The FDA's recent COVID-19 vaccine restrictions are likely just the beginning." Steier and others anticipate the September ACIP meeting with some foreboding, noting that its decisions could create more confusion and new financial barriers for people seeking immunisation.

The upheaval under Kennedy's leadership has unleashed a "cascade of complications" for the US immunisation system, including how many public health workers can administer vaccinations, Benjamin said. "There are states where vaccine deliverers—nurse practitioners or pharmacists, for example—can only give vaccines that are on the [CDC] vaccine schedule. Physicians are a little freer; we can often give things off-schedule under our licenses."

If ACIP does not formally recommend COVID-19 vaccines with fewer restrictions than the FDA, insurance companies might well stop covering immunisations for some populations, creating "massive access barriers", Steier said. "The insurance coverage crisis looming after September's



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For more on the Aug 8, 2025 shooting attack on CDC headquarters see [News Lancet Respir Med](#) 2025; [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600\(25\)00323-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(25)00323-6)

For more on the high-level CDC resignations see [www.science.org/content/article/attempt-to-oust-cdc-director-sparks-key-resignations-agency-officials](https://www.science.org/content/article/attempt-to-oust-cdc-director-sparks-key-resignations-agency-officials)

For more on Sec Kennedy's abrupt firing of 17 veteran ACIP panellists in May, see [News Lancet Child Adolesc Health](#) 2025; [9: 694–5](#)

For Dr Steier's *New York Times* essay on conspiracy theories about vaccines and autism see [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/08/19/opinion/vaccines-autism-evidence.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/08/19/opinion/vaccines-autism-evidence.html)

For more on the Vaccine Integrity Project's evidence-based reviews of RSV, flu, and COVID-19 vaccine safety and efficacy see [www.cidrap.umn.edu/vaccine-integrity-project/immunization-info](http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/vaccine-integrity-project/immunization-info)

For the AAP's 2025 Recommended Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule see [publications.aap.org/redbook/resources/155857a](https://publications.aap.org/redbook/resources/155857a) utologincheck=redirected

For more on ACOG's new respiratory virus vaccination recommendations for pregnant women see [www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2025/08/acog-releases-updated-maternal-immunization-guidance-covid-influenza-rsv](http://www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2025/08/acog-releases-updated-maternal-immunization-guidance-covid-influenza-rsv)

ACIP meeting could make vaccines functionally inaccessible even where technically available", Steier explained. "A COVID-19 vaccine can cost over \$140 without insurance coverage—prohibitive for many families." "Sometimes the mighty dollar skews what happens", Benjamin agreed.

Some US medical societies are also parting company with ACIP and CDC recommendations. A coalition led by the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) at the University of Minnesota has launched the Vaccine Integrity Project (VIP) to provide evidence-based vaccine safety and efficacy information, in coordination with leading US medical societies like the AAP, Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), and the American College of Physicians.

Removing seasoned medical and public health experts from ACIP "created concerns about whether the recommendations will continue to be rigorous and science driven", said Dana Wollins, Senior Vice President of Strategy at IDSA (Washington, DC, USA). "IDSA is joining with other societies through the Vaccine Integrity Project to help fill that void by producing evidence-based, transparent and clinically based recommendations...IDSA's guidelines will address evidence gaps and offer practical recommendations, reinforcing science-driven vaccination policy at a time when the federal process has been weakened."

On Aug 19, VIP released systematic evidence reviews for RSV, COVID-19, and influenza vaccines. That work will inform medical society recommendations for the rapidly approaching US respiratory infection season. The AAP released its RSV, influenza, and COVID-19 vaccination guidance at the same time, as ACOG did for pregnant women. "I think this independent review sets the stage for a legitimate, rigorous scientific recommendation on vaccines", said

Lori Tremmel Freeman (National Association of County and City Health Officials [NACCHO], Washington, DC, USA). Local public health agencies have long relied on a single, trusted source of federal guidance, Freeman noted—an arrangement that offered a cohesive and less confusing message for the public. "If there is a void, our local health departments need to point to some authority for recommendations", Freeman said. "But ideally, we need to get our federal government back on track with providing these in a way the public will trust."

The federal review system "is no longer meeting the highest standards of unbiased rigour that they once did", said James Campbell (University of Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA), vice chair of the AAP Committee on Infectious Diseases. "The AAP decided, after much discussion and review, that the VIP would be able to provide transparent, independent, objective, and rigorous reviews of the available data on vaccine safety and effectiveness that could help us publish fully informed decisions on childhood vaccine recommendations. It was also attractive that all methods, references, and findings would be fully available to all."

The US is not the only country to see shifts in COVID-19 vaccination recommendations. This year, the UK Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommended COVID-19 vaccination only for adults aged 75 years and over, care home residents, and immunosuppressed individuals aged 6 months and older (including immunocompromised pregnant women). Australia no longer recommends COVID-19 immunisation for healthy infants or children. Canada and 12 EU member states—including Germany, France, Poland, Spain, and Italy—continue to recommend vaccination for pregnant individuals and to permit immunisation of healthy children.

US insurers historically followed CDC and ACIP recommendations, but

some are reassessing guidance sources and IDSA is "actively advocating for coverage and electronic health record integration" of medical societies' recommended immunisation schedules, Wollins said. AAP is also in discussions with private insurers to make sure its recommended vaccines are covered, Campbell said. "There is more uncertainty when it comes to the Vaccines for Children (VfC) programme", he noted. Run by the CDC, VfC provides free immunisations to children from low-income backgrounds.

IDSA and AAP are among those suing Kennedy over his unilateral restriction of access to COVID-19 vaccines. Kennedy acted "arbitrarily and capriciously", said lead attorney Richard H Hughes IV (Epstein Becker & Green, Washington, DC, USA). "We want this case to put a stop to an assault on science and vaccines", Hughes said. "We are at a really dangerous moment in history and in our country, when our nation's chief health officer is assailing vaccines."

Funded by an unrestricted gift of US\$240 000 from the Alumbra Foundation, CIDRAP has been able to stand the project up remarkably quickly. But its dependence on philanthropy could put long-term sustainability in question, Benjamin cautioned. The VIP leadership is "very much focused on vaccine integrity", he said. "But the challenge we have with private-sector philanthropy is...they're never there forever. And they cannot match the contribution that the federal government can give. But in a crisis like we're having right now, it's essential that philanthropy steps up and participates. If they don't, people will be hurt."

"We're entering respiratory virus season with massive confusion about vaccine recommendations", Steier said. "The erosion of trust in medical institutions, once lost, may take generations to rebuild."

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