

March 6, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

I write today to raise serious concerns over your ability to lead the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the current measles outbreak and future public health situations, such as the annual flu season. It appears that, despite your attempts to walk back your well-documented anti-vaccine views during your confirmation process, you are still allowing your own uninformed and unscientific beliefs to taint the decisions you are now making as the Secretary of HHS.

The country is currently facing the largest measles outbreak in six years. As of today, two unvaccinated individuals, including one child, have died, marking the first measles-related deaths in a decade.¹ Despite the increasing severity of this outbreak, you have abjectly failed at using your current position as the nation's top health official to educate the public and promote medically accurate and evidence-based solutions. Instead, you have downplayed the severity of the current measles outbreak and spewed misinformation on prevention efforts and treatment.

In a recent interview, you refused to mention vaccines and instead stated that supplements, including "cod liver oil" could be used to treat measles.² The chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Infectious Diseases rejected this, stating that "cod liver oil is 'by no means' an evidence-based treatment for measles" and that he had "never heard of a physician using the supplement against measles."³ You also highlighted that HHS was shipping Vitamin A to the outbreak.⁴ While Vitamin A can be used in certain circumstances as a supportive treatment, it is mostly used with malnourished patients with Vitamin A deficiencies. This

¹ Sun, Lena, "Second death reported in growing measles outbreak," The Washington Post, March 6, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/03/06/measles-death-outbreak-new-mexico/>

² Teddy Rosenbluth, "As Measles Spreads, Kennedy Embraces Remedies Like Cod Liver Oil," The New York Times, March 4, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/04/health/texas-measles-outbreak-kennedy.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lena H. Sun and Fenit Nirappil, "RFK Jr.'s Focus on Vitamin A for Measles Worries Health Experts," The Washington Post, March 4, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/03/04/measles-outbreak-vitamin-a-concerns/>.

treatment is far less useful in the United States, where Vitamin A deficiencies affect less than one percent of the population.⁵ Further, Vitamin A is not a preventive measure. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, it cannot be used as a vaccine alternative and can actually be dangerous in children.⁶

As you know, two doses of the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine are 97 percent effective in preventing measles and are, by far, the most effective medical tool utilized to prevent the disease.⁷ Instead of promoting this medical fact, helping to educate unvaccinated or under-vaccinated communities, you continue to minimize MMR vaccine importance, instead highlighting “dangerous and ineffective” supplements as an alternative.⁸

It is outrageous that 25 years after the measles was declared eliminated from the United States, your response to a growing, deadly outbreak is anything other than fully supporting science and explicitly recommending that the American people protect themselves and their loved ones through vaccination. We know that strong vaccination rates dramatically reduce the likelihood of disease outbreaks. Despite this, likely in part due to your continued anti-vaccine advocacy, vaccination rates are falling well below recommended levels. In Gaines County, Texas, the current epicenter of the measles outbreak, the vaccination rate for kindergartners is only 82 percent.⁹ One county in Arizona say their measles vaccination rate fell from 83 percent to an alarming 75 percent in recent years.¹⁰ As vaccination rates for serious infectious diseases including measles, polio, and whooping cough continue to decline, the likelihood that the United States will face continued outbreaks will only increase.

Not only have you frustrated efforts to combat the current measles outbreak, but your recent actions have also jeopardized our ability to prevent future flu outbreaks. Last week, you cancelled an upcoming meeting of the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).¹¹ This Committee, which is comprised of medical and public health experts, reviews and evaluates data concerning the safety, effectiveness, and appropriate use of vaccines.¹² Notably this Committee was scheduled to meet on March 13, 2025 to discuss which influenza (flu) strains to use in the development of

⁵ Erika Edwards, “Doctors Are Wary of RFK Jr’s Response to the Texas Measles Outbreak.” NBCNews.com, March 4, 2025. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/measles-texas-rfk-jr-response-vaccines-doctors-wary-rcna194510>.

⁶ Sun, “RFK Jr.’s Focus on Vitamin A for Measles Worries Health Experts.”

⁷ “Measles Cases and Outbreaks,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 28, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html>.

⁸ Robert F. Kennedy, “Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.: Measles Outbreak Is Call to Action for All of Us,” Fox News, March 2, 2025, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/robert-f-kennedy-jr-measles-outbreak-call-action-all-us>.

⁹ Nina Agrawal, “Kennedy Said Measles Outbreaks Are ‘Not Unusual.’ Here’s What the Data Says,” The New York Times, February 28, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/28/well/measles-outbreaks-texas-rfk-jr.html>.

¹⁰ Francesca Paris, “Childhood Vaccination Rates Were Falling Even before the Rise of R.F.K. Jr.,” The New York Times, January 12, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/01/13/upshot/vaccination-rates.html>.

¹¹ “Flu Vaccine Panel Meeting Canceled, US FDA Confirms,” Reuters, February 28, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-fda-confirms-cancellation-vaccine-advisers-meeting-2025-02-27/>.

¹² “Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee,” U.S. Food and Drug Administration, April 26, 2019, <https://www.fda.gov/advisory-committees/blood-vaccines-and-other-biologics/vaccines-and-related-biological-products-advisory-committee>.

vaccines for the upcoming 2025-2026 flu season.¹³ It takes months for drug manufacturers to create enough vaccine stock for the upcoming flu season and it is important that they have the recommendation from the VRBPAC as soon as possible to ensure providers are prepared when flu season begins in October. This meeting is critically important to ensuring Americans can protect themselves from contracting the flu and its abrupt cancellation puts the public health of the nation at risk.

HHS has indicated that, despite the cancellation of this meeting, the flu vaccine will be available for the upcoming flu season without VRBPAC input. However, I am deeply troubled by the Administration's decision to make a recommendation directly to manufacturers without the opinion of independent experts.¹⁴ This is especially concerning in light of President Trump's decision to cut critical communication between the CDC and the World Health Organization, who recently conducted their international meeting to discuss the upcoming flu season, and your recent decision to cancel a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.¹⁵

In times like these the public needs a strong leader who will tell them the truth and put their health and safety first. You are falling short. Since taking control of HHS you have fired thousands of employees tasked with protecting the public from emerging health threats, swayed various nonpartisan career officials to resign due to your leadership, and allegedly drove the Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs to leave less than two weeks after his appointment.¹⁶ This alarming trend does not inspire confidence in your ability to run the agency my Republican colleagues handed you and increasingly confirms my position that you are a dangerous person for the job.

Given the serious impacts your decisions have on public health, I request answers to the following questions by March 20, 2025:

1. Do you believe that childhood vaccinations are important in preventing the spread of infectious diseases?
2. Do you agree that the MMR vaccine is the most effective way to protect individuals against measles?
3. Will you recommend that unvaccinated children receive the MMR vaccine?

¹³ Nathaniel Weixel, "FDA Cancels Meeting to Choose Flu Vaccine Strain," The Hill, February 27, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/5166809-fda-cancels-flu-vaccine-strain-meeting>.

¹⁴ Berkeley Lovelace, "Could Flu Shot Supply Fall Short This Year? FDA's Canceled Meeting Sparks Worries," NBCNews.com, February 27, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/flu-shot-supply-fall-short-year-fdas-canceled-meeting-sparks-worries-rcna194031>

¹⁵ Gabrielle Emanuel, "Effective Immediately: CDC Can't Talk to WHO. What Will That Mean for World Health?" NPR, January 29, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2025/01/29/nx-s1-5276340/trump-centers-for-disease-control-cdc-world-health-organization>; "Recommendations Announced for Influenza Vaccine Composition for the 2025–2026 Northern Hemisphere Influenza Season," World Health Organization, February 28, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-02-2025-recommendations-announced-for-influenza-vaccine-composition-for-the-2025-2026-northern-hemisphere-influenza-season>; Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Christina Jewett, "F.D.A. Cancels Meeting of Vaccine Experts Scheduled to Advise on Flu Shots," The New York Times, February 26, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/26/us/politics/fda-flu-vaccine.html>.

¹⁶ Adam Cancryn, Chelsea Cirruzzo, and Ruth Reader, "Inside RFK Jr.'s Health Department Takeover," Politico, February 22, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/22/rfk-hhs-first-week-vaccine-advisers-workforce-00205596>; Adam Cancryn, "Top HHS Spokesperson Quits after Clashing with RFK Jr.," Politico, March 3, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/03/top-hhs-spokesperson-quits-00207000>.

4. Given the falling rates of childhood vaccinations across the country, what is your plan to increase vaccination levels?
 - a. Is HHS deploying any resources to increase education and awareness of the MMR vaccine for individuals in and around communities impacted by the measles outbreak?
 - b. How does HHS plan to improve education and outreach to communities not directly impacted to prevent additional outbreaks?
5. What are the current staffing levels at the National Vaccine Program Office?
 - a. Have any staffers at the National Vaccine Program Office been terminated? If so, how many and why?
6. What are the current staffing levels at the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Disease at the CDC?
 - a. Have any staffers at the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Disease have been terminated? If so, how many and why?
7. Were any employees directly or indirectly working at the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Disease or at the National Vaccine Program Office fired during the recent HHS layoffs?
 - a. If so, please describe their roles, why they were terminated, and what analysis HHS performed before their firings to ensure that vaccination efforts would not suffer.
8. Why was the VRBPAC meeting scheduled for March 13, 2025 cancelled?
 - a. Were you involved in any way in the decision to cancel the VRBPAC meeting? If so, in what way?
 - b. If HHS will not rely on the VRBPAC for expert input, which experts will be consulted in providing recommendation pertaining to which strain of flu vaccine manufacturers should produce?
 - i. Please provide a list of the individuals consulted.
 - ii. What are the credentials of the individuals consulted?
 - c. When can manufacturers expect to receive this recommendation?
9. Will you reschedule the meeting immediately? If not, why not?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" being the most prominent.

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate