

ASAN Troubled by Secretary Kennedy's Comments and HHS' Adoption of ACIP Recommendations on Thimerosal

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network is troubled by the Department of Health and Human Services' adoption of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendation to prevent the use of multi-dose vials for influenza vaccination and Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s comments on thimerosal. It perpetuates old, debunked theories on the safety of vaccines that undermines the trust in established, thoroughly and well conducted science. It also endangers influenza vaccine access in countries that lack the resources to safely store an adequate amount of single-dose vial influenza vaccines.

In early June, the seventeen members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) were fired from the committee by Secretary Kennedy. Kennedy later handpicked eight replacement members and on June 25th and June 26th, 2025 the newly appointed members of the met for the first time. The meeting covered a range of topics including a presentation by Lyn Redwood on the vaccine preservative thimerosal. Redwood was the former President of Children's Health Defense, a nonprofit organization started by RFK Jr. known for spreading anti-vaccine beliefs. Redwood's presentation cited studies with findings with weak correlations and could not be replicated when studied again. [An earlier version of her presentation cited a study that does not exist](#). The presentation and Redwood's statements at the meeting included misleading information about ethylmercury, one of the compounds thimerosal is turned into in the body. [Ethylmercury is safely and quickly removed from the body in stool](#), unlike methylmercury which is toxic in high amounts. We know this because of the dozens of studies done on thimerosal in the past three decades after advocates like Lyn Redwood believed it causes autism. [Thimerosal does not cause autism](#).

At the end of the meeting on June 26th, the members of ACIP voted to only approve single-dose influenza vaccines for children, pregnant women, and adults for the 2025-2026 flu season. This means no approval for any flu vaccine that contains thimerosal. Only one member of the panel voted against this decision with another member abstaining, the rest voted in favor. We know less about potential alternatives to thimerosal and how they would react with flu vaccine ingredients than we do about thimerosal. This decision effectively will prevent the use of multi-dose vial influenza vaccines and their coverage by insurance. Multi-dose vial influenza vaccines primarily serve populations in areas where mass refrigeration and refrigerated transportation is cost-prohibitive or not possible. Vaccine manufacturers currently estimate they can meet demand for the 2025-2026 flu season in the United States with single-dose vial influenza vaccines, but not internationally. This is because ACIP recommendations are used internationally for vaccine safety decisions. We hope the domestic estimate of the vaccine manufacturers is accurate and we do not see a drop-off in vaccination rates, but internationally,

it is clear more people will get the flu and die in the lowest-income areas around the world because of this decision. We believe this demonstrates a lack of responsibility and scientific knowledge among the ACIP members who voted in favor of only approving single-dose vials.

In the absence of a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) director, Secretary Kennedy personally approved these recommendations on July 23rd, 2025. Notably, Kennedy did not approve or deny any of the other ACIP recommendations voted on during that meeting, including approval of the strains for the 2025-2026 flu season. This has rightfully received backlash from medical and vaccine safety professionals and advocates. This led to HHS releasing a promotional video with Secretary Kennedy on August 2nd. Kennedy repeated several misinformation about thimerosal, including linking it to autism. The words and actions of Secretary Kennedy demonstrate a complete and total disregard for scientific integrity and the truth. It directly contradicts the known science [still shared by the CDC](#). Fostering an illusion by falsely validating decades-long conspiracy theories will damage scientific trust, especially in vaccines, for years to come. We are deeply concerned by this repeated pattern of behavior and fear the continued spread of lies about the cause of autism in the next Make America Healthy Again Commission Report and future initiatives. [Secretary Kennedy should resign or be removed as Secretary of Health and Human Services](#).

Until there are members of ACIP and a Secretary of Health and Human Services that will make decisions based on sound scientific evidence, there is a desperate need for reliable sources on scientific, medical, and public health information. We appreciate the [efforts being taken by the American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and call on other professional organizations to do the same. Similarly, we call on state governments to provide resources and share accurate scientific, medical, and public health information in the absence of the federal government.