



OPINION: RFK'S DANGEROUS AUTISM LIE - DAVID HARSANYI

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Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has spread many detestable theories in his life, but none is more detestable than his scaremongering over autism and vaccines.

It's not merely that the new Health and Human Services secretary has convinced thousands of Americans that they're partially responsible for their children's autism -- a trend he once compared to a "holocaust" -- it's that he's ensuring thousands more will put their children in needless danger for absolutely no scientific or rational reason.

One of Kennedy's claims is the lie that Americans have seen a huge spike in autism cases over the past 40 years. Autism rates, RFK said during his congressional hearings, "have gone from 1 in 10,000 ... and today in our children, it's one in 34." Kennedy repeated this statistic during his swearing ceremony. "Who can believe that?" he added. "There's something wrong. There's something wrong, and I think it's something that can be found out."

President Donald Trump repeated this statistic on Truth Social and in his executive order instituting the Make America Healthy Again Commission.

Where the 1-10,000 number came from, however, is a mystery. Even in 1966, when autism was diagnosed as a child being socially isolated and showing withdrawn behavior, researchers estimated that around 1 in 2,500 children were autistic.

Maybe next Kennedy will go back to 1943, the year autism was first designated a condition, and only 1 in 100 million Americans were diagnosed.

The idea that anyone had any useful handle on the number of autistic children in the past, much less used the same criterion we do, is preposterous. Autism wasn't even a separate diagnosis from schizophrenia in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders until 1980, the year Kennedy said the affliction began rising.

Before 1991, the federal government lumped children with autism in with other "intellectual disabilities." In 1994, the definition of autism included Asperger syndrome and children on the milder end of the spectrum.

Researchers didn't start trying to track autism until 2000. It wasn't until 2006 that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended screening all children for autism during routine pediatrician visits in the first two years, and many still did not. It wasn't until 2013 that present guidelines were instituted.

Even now, there's no objective test for autism -- no blood test -- for diagnosis. So, the prevalence of autism has varied greatly between states, which points to different levels of awareness and testing. States like Rhode Island and Maryland have higher percentages than Louisiana and Texas.

When Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), a physician, implored the HHS nominee to "reassure mothers unequivocally and without qualification" that vaccines do not cause autism, he would not.

"If the data is there, I will absolutely do that," Kennedy responded.  Not only will I do that, but I will apologize for any statements that misled people otherwise."

No, he won't. Because tons of data already exists, and Kennedy keeps ignoring it, repeating debunked claims and creating fear.

Let's momentarily set aside the fact that studies have shown autism likely begins in the womb, long before any vaccines are even given to children.

Kennedy made his name in the anti-vaccine movement by contending that there was a link between thimerosal, a preservative, and the "epidemic of childhood neurological disorders" in Rolling Stone and other publications. Indeed, he wrote that the government "colluded with Big Pharma to hide the risks of thimerosal from the public."

There was never a shred of evidence this was true, and, in due time, publications all retracted Kennedy's pieces.

Indeed, RFK ignored numerous CDC studies that found no connection between the two. In 2004, researchers in Denmark -- a nation with highly accurate centralized health records -- conducted a study of every child vaccinated in that country between 1971 and 2000 and found that there "was no trend toward an increase in the incidence of autism during that period when thimerosal was used."

Once thimerosal was removed from most vaccines over these fears, Kennedy moved on to spreading unfalsifiable paranoia about alleged unknown factors in MMR shots causing a giant spike in autism.

At least 27 major studies have found no connection between MMR vaccines and autism.

How many studies will draw an apology from Kennedy? 28? 128?

Moreover, in 2013, a CDC study found no connection between the number of vaccine antibodies used and the risk of an autism diagnosis.

In 2015, JAMA published the largest randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial on vaccines ever done, analyzing the health records of over 95,000 children and found that MMR vaccine did not increase the risk of autism.

Of course, it's good to "question science." Serious people are out there doing it every day. But if you spend your life ignoring the preponderance of the scientific evidence, you're not "questioning science," you're just a quack. In this case, a dangerous one.