

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. On Trump's Proposed Vaccine Commission

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Environmental attorney Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., [an outspoken vaccine critic](#), said today that he was asked by President-elect Donald Trump to chair a “vaccine safety and scientific integrity” commission. (A Trump spokesperson, however, later said that [“no decisions have been made at this time” about such a commission.](#)) Kennedy espouses discredited links between vaccines and neurological disorders, including autism. He has also been harshly critical of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which recommends the childhood vaccine schedule. Scientists and others have [fiercely disputed](#) Kennedy’s claims.

Science Insider caught up with Kennedy by telephone in an airport flight lounge shortly after he met with Trump in New York City. He made it clear that CDC’s vaccine scientists and practices will be a major focus of the commission’s work. Excerpts from our interview, which have been edited for brevity and clarity, appear below.



Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

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Q: What happened in the meeting?

A: It was an hour meeting and the vice president-elect came in to the last 15 minutes. The meeting was with [Trump] and Kellyanne Conway [recently appointed counselor to the president].

Q: Did the president-elect request the meeting or did you?

A: He called me a week ago to request it.

Q: Why?

A: He wants to make sure that we have the best vaccine science and the safest vaccine supply that we can have.

Q: Did the president-elect indicate that he doesn’t believe that to be the case at the moment?

A: He is troubled by questions of the links between certain vaccines and the epidemic of neurodevelopmental disorders including autism. And he has a number—he told me five—friends, he talked about each one of them, who has the same story of a child, a

perfectly healthy child who went into a wellness visit around age 2, got a battery of vaccines, spiked a fever, and then developed a suite of deficits in the 3 months following the vaccine.

He said that he understood that anecdote was not science, but said that if there's enough anecdotal evidence ... that we'd be arrogant to dismiss it. Those were his words.

Q: Was there a particular vaccine he felt was culpable?

A: He doesn't know whether it's the schedule or the sheer number of vaccines or the age at which they're given or the ingredients.

Q: Did the president-elect mention CDC?

A: We talked a lot about CDC and ways to increase the independence from financial conflicts at CDC in the vaccine division.

Q: You said that the commission is to delve into "vaccine safety and scientific integrity." What is that second piece about?

A: To make sure that we're getting good science out of CDC.

Q: It's all about CDC? It's not about "scientific integrity" in chemistry or physics or basic biology or anywhere else?

A: Exactly. [CDC] is the locus of most of the most serious problems with the vaccine program, the two divisions at CDC: the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and the Immunization Safety Office, which is where the scientists are.

Q: How many people will be on the commission?

A: A dozen people—a mix between science people and prominent Americans.

Q: Who will you ask to serve?

A: I couldn't tell you. I just finished meeting with the president-elect an hour ago.

Q: When you say "science people," do you mean experts from the scientific establishment?

A: Prominent scientists.

Q: Do you mean prominent vaccinologists who believe in the safety and efficacy of today's vaccines?

A: We are going to look for people who have expertise in toxicology, epidemiology, and in public health.

Q: When does the president-elect want you to have the commission in place?

A: We didn't talk about the details but he expressed urgency about it. That he wanted it done—we talked about a 1-year commitment.

Q: It's an unpaid panel?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you have scientific training?

A: No. My background is I'm an environmental lawyer. I'm not a scientist. But I have an expertise, I would say, in reading science and spotting junk science because that's what I do with most of my time.

Q: Rates of childhood infectious diseases have plummeted over the past half-century or so. Are you out to return us to the dark ages?

A: I am for vaccines. I have been tracking mercury in fish for 30 years and nobody has called me antifish. I am pro-vaccine. I had all my kids vaccinated. I think vaccines save lives. But we are also seeing an explosion in neurodevelopmental disorders and we ought to be able to do a cost-benefit analysis and see what's causing them. We ought to have robust, transparent science and an independent regulatory agency. Nobody is trying to get rid of vaccines here. I just want safe vaccines.

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