

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-3641  
Minority (202) 225-2927

May 6, 2026

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write regarding the recent decision by Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, your National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director who also currently oversees the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to suppress the publication of a scientific paper demonstrating the COVID-19 vaccine's effectiveness in reducing hospitalizations.<sup>1</sup> The study, titled *Interim Effectiveness of 2025-2026 COVID-19 Vaccines in Adults*, was originally slated to be published in CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* on March 19, 2026.<sup>2</sup> This study found that the COVID-19 vaccine reduced emergency department and urgent care visits and hospitalizations among healthy adults by about half during the 2025–2026 winter.<sup>3</sup> Despite having cleared CDC's rigorous scientific review process, Dr. Bhattacharya reportedly delayed publication of the study, which was later pulled in its entirety.<sup>4</sup>

Though the study's findings align with years of scientific evidence and standard *MMWR* methodology, Dr. Bhattacharya dismissed it as unreliable.<sup>5</sup> His weeks-delayed defense of his decision in an opinion piece failed to address why those concerns warranted withholding information from the public that could keep Americans out of the hospital.<sup>6</sup> The methods he criticized are well-established, and have underpinned peer-reviewed studies published in the nation's leading and most influential public health journals such as *The New England Journal of*

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<sup>1</sup> *CDC Won't Publish Report Showing Covid Shots Cut Likelihood of Hospital Visits*, The Washington Post (Apr. 22, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*; *Exclusive: Here's the COVID-19 Vaccine Paper the CDC Censored*, Inside Medicine (Apr. 27, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> See note 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Exclusive: Here's the COVID-19 Vaccine Paper the CDC Censored*, Inside Medicine (Apr. 27, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> *Under My Leadership, the CDC Will Follow The Evidence*, The Washington Post (Apr. 30, 2026).

*Medicine*.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Bhattacharya also defended his intervention in the publication process by stating such decisions “fall[] squarely within the CDC director’s responsibilities....”<sup>8</sup> But Dr. Bhattacharya is not the CDC Director; that position has been vacant for eight months, with President Trump’s nominee pending before the Senate.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Bhattacharya’s refusal to publish this study appears to be a deliberate effort to suppress evidence of vaccine effectiveness by your hand-selected ideological ally.

Dr. Bhattacharya’s latest actions reinforce a disturbing year-long pattern of the Trump Administration’s Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) obstructing the flow of scientific information that helps to keep Americans healthy. On January 21, 2025, the Trump Administration instructed federal health agencies to pause all external communications.<sup>10</sup> Staff were directed to refrain from issuing any communication until it had been “reviewed and approved by a Presidential appointee.”<sup>11</sup> Two days later, *MMWR* failed to publish for the first time in its 65-year history and missed a second issue the following week.<sup>12</sup> Shortly thereafter, CDC removed critical public health information about mpox prevention, HIV, and mental health from its website pursuant to a White House order.<sup>13</sup> A federal district court later ordered CDC to restore the information, finding the removals lacked a reasoned scientific basis and jeopardized access to treatment for severe, life-threatening conditions.<sup>14</sup> Dr. Bhattacharya’s latest suppression of the *Interim Effectiveness* study fits squarely within this larger pattern of manipulating the flow of scientific information that threatens the lives of Americans.

Dr. Bhattacharya’s recent suppression of vaccine effectiveness data is consistent with the anti-vaccine positions that have defined his career. Before serving in government, Dr. Bhattacharya co-led the Great Barrington Declaration, which advocated for widespread COVID-19 transmission to achieve “herd immunity,” an approach dismissed by infectious disease experts as a “dangerous fallacy unsupported by scientific evidence.”<sup>15</sup> As NIH Director, he helped drive an HHS-wide pivot away from mRNA vaccines, even though this technology saved millions of lives during the COVID-19 pandemic and has demonstrated potential to treat cancers, malaria,

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<sup>7</sup> See note 5.

<sup>8</sup> See note 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Trump Nominates Erica Schwartz, Former Deputy Surgeon General, to Serve as CDC Director*, The Washington Post (Apr. 16, 2026).

<sup>10</sup> *Trump Officials Pause Health Agencies’ Communications, Citing Review*, The Washington Post (Jan. 21, 2025); Department of Health and Human Services, *Immediate Pause on Issuing Documents and Public Communications - ACTION* (Jan. 21, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *This Embattled CDC Publication Is A Big Deal For Public Health*, Forbes (Oct. 14, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> *CDC Webpages Go Dark as Trump Targets Public Health Information*, The Guardian (Feb. 4, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Memorandum Opinion (Feb. 11, 2025), *Doctors for America v. OPM*, D.D.C. (No. 24-322).

<sup>15</sup> Nisreen A. Alwan et al., *Scientific Consensus on the COVID-19 Pandemic: What We Need To Act Now*, The Lancet (Oct. 31, 2020); *Scientists Are Slamming The Great Barrington Declaration’s Call For “Herd Immunity”*, BuzzFeed News (Oct. 15, 2020).

hepatitis C, and other emerging infectious diseases.<sup>16</sup> He has sidestepped NIH's rigorous review process to direct taxpayer dollars towards outdated research technologies and retaliated against career NIH officials who have objected to his anti-vaccine hostility.<sup>17</sup> With Dr. Bhattacharya now overseeing the CDC, it is unsurprising that he has continued to leverage his position to subvert public confidence in vaccination by suppressing scientific evidence that goes against his ideology.

We are deeply skeptical that Dr. Bhattacharya's recent call for a parallel CDC publication alongside *MMWR* will be anything more than an effort to cloak unfounded anti-vaccine claims in CDC legitimacy.<sup>18</sup> As HHS suppresses beneficial information about vaccines, it has also amplified unscientific claims about vaccine safety. These actions distort the public's understanding of the risks and benefits of immunization. For example, on November 19, 2025, CDC published a webpage aimed at disputing the longstanding scientific consensus that vaccines do not cause autism.<sup>19</sup> While it parses prior studies to manufacture doubt about that consensus, it fails to address the well-established benefits of vaccines in preventing serious illness.<sup>20</sup> For example, its discussion of studies on the DTaP vaccine—which have never found a causal link to autism—omits that the vaccine has been associated with more than an 80 percent reduction in pertussis.<sup>21</sup> This creates a misleading impression of the true balance of vaccines' risks against their protection. Similarly, on November 28, 2025, Dr. Vinay Prasad, then-Director of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), issued a staff memo proposing new, onerous standards for vaccine approvals based on an unverified analysis linking 10 pediatric deaths to the COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>22</sup> As Dr. Prasad amplified these unsupported claims, he omitted the well-established evidence that COVID-19 vaccinations during 2020-2024 likely averted more than 2.5 million deaths globally.<sup>23</sup> The result is a skewed risk perception that overstates harm, understates proven benefits, and distorts the public's understanding of vaccination's true ability to protect American families. Because of the ways

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<sup>16</sup> *Why the NIH is Pivoting Away From mRNA Vaccines*, The Washington Post (Aug. 12, 2025); Penn Medicine, *World-Changing mRNA Vaccines* (<https://www.pennmedicine.org/about/pioneering-the-future-of-medicine/mrna>) (accessed May 6, 2026).

<sup>17</sup> *Whistle-Blower Complaints Detail Tension Over Vaccines at NIH*, The New York Times (Sept. 4, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> See note 6.

<sup>19</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Autism and Vaccines* (Nov. 19, 2025) (<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/about/autism.html>).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*; Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institute for Vaccine Safety, *Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis* (Sept. 5, 2025) (<https://www.vaccinesafety.edu/vaccine-preventable-diseases/>).

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Vinay Prasad, Director, Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, to Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research Staff (Nov. 28, 2025); *FDA to Raise Hurdles For Vaccines, Faulting COVID Shots for 10 Kids' Deaths*, NPR (Nov. 29, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Vinay Prasad, Director, Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, to Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research Staff (Nov. 28, 2025); John P. A. Ioannidis et al., *Global Estimates of Lives and Life-Years Saved by COVID-19 Vaccination During 2020-2024*, JAMA Health (July 25, 2024).

your actions deliberately misrepresent the risk of vaccinations, many Americans may needlessly forgo immunization, and as a result get sick, hospitalized, or die.

Dr. Bhattacharya's suppression of the *Interim Effectiveness* study has the potential to expose Americans to further death and disease. To address our concerns, we request answers to the following by May 20, 2026:

1. Since January 20, 2025, has any HHS political appointee, including Dr. Bhattacharya, directed the delay, suppression, or editing of any study published or scheduled for publication in *MMWR*?
2. Over the past ten years, how many *MMWR* manuscripts have been rejected after clearing full internal scientific review? Please provide a year-by-year count and the subject matter of each.
3. Was Dr. Bhattacharya responsible for pulling the *Interim Effectiveness* study from publication in its entirety, after his initial delay? If not, who made that decision and why?
4. Does CDC ever intend to publish the *Interim Effectiveness* study in *MMWR*?
5. Please describe any current or planned changes to *MMWR*'s editorial independence, including whether any new layers of political or non-scientific review have or will be added to its publication process.
6. Do you agree with CDC's suppression of the *Interim Effectiveness* study under Dr. Bhattacharya's leadership?
  - a. Have you had any conversations directly with Dr. Bhattacharya about this issue?
  - b. If so, when were they and what did you discuss?
7. Have you had any conversations with staff at the White House about this issue? If so, when, and with whom?
8. You have called for the development of a parallel CDC journal to supplement *MMWR*.
  - a. Who will be responsible for the planning, development, editorial control, and publication of this journal?
  - b. What role, if any, will political leadership at the White House, HHS, CDC or any other federal agency have in the journal's editorial process?
  - c. When does CDC plan to launch this publication?

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d. What safeguards will be in place to ensure the journal's scientific independence?

Thank you for your attention to this request. Please contact Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-2927 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member



Diana DeGette  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health



Yvette D. Clarke  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight  
and Investigations

cc: The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Chairman

The Honorable H. Morgan Griffith  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Health

The Honorable John Joyce  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations