



The Death of American Medical Exceptionalism

The resurgence of preventable diseases like measles and pertussis is a stark, sobering reminder of the vital importance of vaccines and evidence-based medicine. As of April 10, 2025, the U.S. has reported 712 measles cases, more than double the total from all of 2024. A staggering 97% of these cases involved individuals who were either unvaccinated or had unknown vaccination status. There have been 74 hospitalizations and 3 deaths, including two young children. All three deaths were in unvaccinated persons. The Measles vaccine is 97% effective and these tragedies were completely preventable.

Pertussis (whooping cough) is also on the rise. A current outbreak in Louisiana has contributed to over 35,000 reported cases nationwide, including 10 deaths—6 of whom were infants under 12 months old. The DTaP vaccine, given in childhood, is 90% effective, and the Tdap vaccine administered to pregnant women in the third trimester reduces pertussis cases in newborns by 77%.

Maryland's vaccination rates for measles and pertussis in children remain high at 96%. But only 75% of children in the state receive all recommended vaccines by age two. Complacency is dangerous. Misinformation is even more so. If vaccine hesitancy continues to spread, these numbers will fall—just as they have in the states currently experiencing outbreaks.

The facts are clear: the MMR and DTaP/Tdap vaccines are safe. Period. Their safety and effectiveness have been confirmed through decades of research across countless studies, spanning multiple countries and healthcare systems. The scientific debate on this issue has been well settled.

At the heart of this problem lies the influence of vocal anti-vaccine rhetoric that is not only scientifically unsound but also profoundly irresponsible. Endorsements of unproven, minimally beneficial or even dangerous strategies have left vulnerable children sicker. Arguments relying on cherry-picked data and long-debunked claims exploit the fears of well-meaning parents.

In my own medical practice, I've seen the consequences firsthand. Patients swayed by misinformation have opted out of vaccinations in favor of dubious treatments with no proven benefit. The results are heartbreaking and entirely avoidable.

Unfortunately, we are living in a time when ideology too often drowns out science. Institutions we once relied on, such as the NIH, FDA, CDC, ACIP (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices), and USPSTF (United States Preventive Services Task Force), once a bedrock of American medical exceptionalism, have been deeply undermined. Over 10,000 employees have left or been pushed out of the Department of Health and Human Services. The resignation of respected scientists, including Dr. Peter Marks of the FDA, signals an erosion of expertise at a time we need it most.

Until these agencies are empowered once again to lead based on science and data, we must turn to trusted medical organizations like the American Academy of Family Physicians. Their voices remain rooted in evidence, not ideology.

Vaccines are among the greatest achievements in medical history. They have eradicated or drastically reduced diseases that once devastated communities. Today, the death of a child under five is a rare tragedy in the U.S., but before widespread vaccination, it was a common occurrence.

For over 70 years, the United States has led the world in medical research, public health, and evidence-based medicine. That leadership, our medical exceptionalism, is in jeopardy. Not because we lack knowledge or capability, but because of a lack of courage to follow our scientific convictions.

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