Report to the Boards of Health

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District Health Department 10, Friday, July 25, 2025

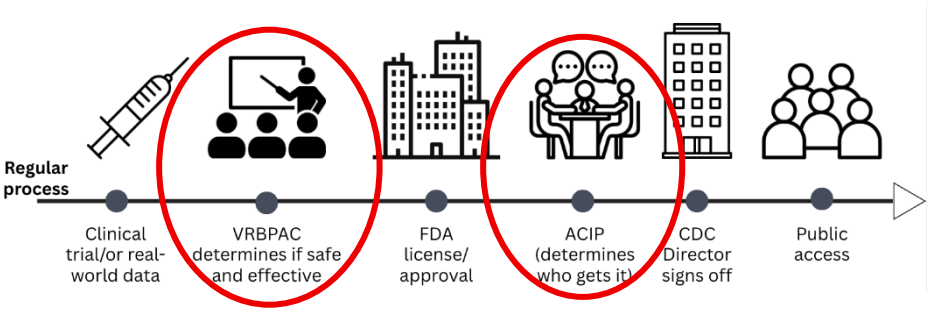
Changes to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)

Advisory committees have helped the federal government make decisions since George Washington's time. These committees give expert advice to government agencies but don't make laws or rules themselves. The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) of 1972 set up rules for how these committee's work.

Four federal committees help make decisions about vaccines:

- Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- National Vaccine Advisory Committee (NVAC) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Advisory Commission on Childhood Vaccines (ACCV) at HHS

VRBPAC and ACIP are very important in recommendations for the approval and use of vaccines.



https://substack.com/home/post/p-164017314

Vaccine Approval Process

- FDA must first approve and license a vaccine, with recommendations from VRBPAC
- ACIP reviews the vaccine and makes recommendations about its use. Sometimes, the recommendations are different from the FDA labeling.
- The CDC Director reviews ACIP recommendations. If approved, recommendations become official CDC policy.
    - **Current concern:** There is no CDC Director right now, so the HHS Secretary would approve the vaccine recommendations. This is concerning as the current HHS Secretary is a lawyer with no training in medicine or public health.

History of ACIP

In the 1940s and 1950s, as vaccines were new, the government would put together expert groups only when needed, or *ad hoc*. For example, in 1955, experts were brought together *ad hoc* to discuss use of the first effective polio vaccine developed by Jonas Salk. Shortly after, other *ad hoc* groups were formed to help the Surgeon General during the "Cutter incident," when some of this early polio vaccine accidentally contained live virus and made people sick with polio.

In the early 1960s more vaccines were coming out and it was clear the country needed a permanent group of experts, not just temporary committees. In 1964, the first official ACIP was appointed by the Surgeon General. In 1972, it became a federal advisory committee under the FACA.

How ACIP Works

Before making their recommendations, the ACIP looks at:

- How common and serious diseases are
- Safety information for vaccines
- How well the vaccines work
- Cost and benefits of any vaccine recommendation they are considering
- How easy vaccines are to use
- The quality of the evidence they are using to make their decisions
    - Since 2010, ACIP has used a system called the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) to judge the quality of evidence

The ACIP's advice is important as it creates

- The routine immunization schedules
- The list of free vaccines for children through the Vaccines for Children Program
- Vaccine to be coverage by health insurance (under the Affordable Care Act)

Like other federal advisory committees, the ACIP operates under a charter which says they are to have:

- Up to 19 voting members, including a chair
- Members chosen by the HHS Secretary for overlapping terms of up to 4 years
- Members that are to be experts in at least one of the following: immunization and public health; the use of vaccines in clinical practice; vaccine research; assessment of vaccine efficacy and safety
- One person who understands community concerns about vaccines
- Six non-voting members from other government agencies
- Non-voting representatives from several medical organizations
- Meetings about 3 times per year open to the public

Recent Major Changes - What Has Happened in 2025

- February 26-28 ACIP meeting was postponed, then moved to April 15-16
- In early June 2025, the HHS Secretary fired all 17 ACIP members
    - Reason given: stop the ACIP from functioning as "a rubber stamp for industry profit-taking agendas" and it was necessary to reestablish public confidence in vaccine science
    - This decision was strongly opposed by many medical and public health groups and others

The New ACIP Members appointed by HHS Secretary

Members with Relevant Experience:

- **Cody Meissner, MD** - Pediatric infectious disease expert, former ACIP member (2008-2012)

Members with Limited Vaccine Experience:

- **Martin Kulldorff, PhD (Chair)** - Biostatistician, co-wrote Great Barrington Declaration against COVID restrictions, fired from Harvard for refusing COVID vaccine
- **Joseph Hibbeln, MD** - Psychiatrist, no published vaccines research
- **Retsef Levi, PhD** - Business professor, has raised concerns about mRNA vaccine safety
- **Robert Malone, MD** - Helped develop mRNA vaccines but now calls himself "anti-vaxx"

- **James Pagano, MD** - Emergency medicine doctor (retired), no published vaccine research
- **Vicky Pebsworth, PhD, RN** - Board member of National Vaccine Information Center (organization that highlights risks for vaccine injury and death)

Member Who Withdrew:

- **Michael Ross, MD** - Left after questions about financial ties to pharmaceutical companies

What Happened at the First New ACIP Meeting (June 25-26, 2025)

Key Outcomes:

- Before meeting, discussion of fall COVID-19 vaccine recommendations was removed from the agenda
- Committee voted to continue yearly flu shots for everyone 6 months and older
- Analysis found more than 50 false statements made during the 2-day meeting (full analysis available here https://www.evicollective.org/tec-briefs).

Recommendations:

1. Support nonbiased science and expertise in public health decision-making.
2. The board of health to understand how vaccine approvals and recommendations are made. This is important as the health department carries and provides vaccines based on these recommendations per the Michigan Public Health Code.
3. Acknowledge the importance of the ACIP for things such as:
    a. Public trust in vaccines and vaccine science
    b. Creating immunization recommendation
    c. Access through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program, which provides free vaccines to eligible children
    d. Insurance coverage for vaccines

Resources:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) will independently publish childhood immunization recommendations https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/immunizations/
- The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) has created the Vaccine Integrity Project "dedicated to safeguarding vaccine use in the U.S. so that it remains grounded in the best available science, free from external influence, and focused on optimizing protection of individuals, families, and communities against vaccine-preventable diseases" https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/vaccine-integrity-project

References:

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- HHS Takes Bold Step to Restore Public Trust in Vaccines by Reconstituting ACIP. HHS Press Release. 2025. https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restore-public-trust-vaccines-acip.html
- Ledford, Heidi, and Rachel Fieldhouse. "Who is on RFK Jr's new vaccine panel—and what will they do?." Nature 642.8069 (2025): 846-848.
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- Panthagani, K. 2025. RFK Jr fires vaccine advisory committee and replaces members with vaccine skeptics. You Can Know Things. https://www.youcanknowthings.com/rfk-jr-fires-vaccine-advisory-committee-and-replaces-members-with-vaccine-skeptics/
- ACIP June 25-26 materials:
  - Meeting Materials: https://www.cdc.gov/acip/meetings/presentation-slides-june-25-26-2025.html
  - YouTube Live Stream Link 6-25-2025: https://youtube.com/live/2PnYYb_xj3U?feature=share
  - YouTube Live Stream Link 6-26-2025: https://youtube.com/live/z-16fImZoEc?feature=share