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Kennedy Halts $500 Million in mRNA Vaccine Projects, Affecting Pfizer and Moderna

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— Categories: Politics & Government

U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has terminated nearly $500 million in funding for 22 mRNA-based vaccine projects, signalling a major shift in federal vaccine development priorities. The decision affects ongoing and planned research targeting COVID-19, influenza, and H5N1, and significantly impacts pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer and Moderna.

Kennedy, who has long expressed skepticism about mRNA technology, stated that the move reflects concerns over its effectiveness in preventing respiratory infections and the need to prioritise alternative vaccine platforms, including whole-virus approaches. While some projects near completion will be allowed to proceed, all new and pending contracts have been cancelled.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through its Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), had been backing the now-halted projects as part of broader pandemic preparedness. Funding will now be redirected toward what Kennedy's team describes as "more established and mutation-resilient" vaccine strategies.

The announcement drew sharp criticism from public health experts. Infectious disease specialist Mike Osterholm called the move a "strategic misstep" that risks weakening the country's preparedness for future outbreaks. He and others warn that mRNA platforms, which proved instrumental during the COVID-19 pandemic, remain critical for rapid-response vaccine development and wider medical innovation.

In a related development, Kennedy dismissed all 17 members of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. The newly appointed, smaller advisory group reportedly includes individuals with limited immunisation expertise, raising concerns over scientific integrity in vaccine policymaking.

Dr. Vinay Prasad, now leading vaccine policy at the Food and Drug Administration under Kennedy, had also further restricted the approval of new COVID-19 vaccines. His recent decisions limited access to new

Moderna and Novavax boosters, approving them only for high-risk groups such as the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions, citing lower hospitalisation rates and potential adverse events like myocarditis.

Critics argue that these combined actions, cutting funding, reshaping advisory bodies, and limiting vaccine access, could undermine public confidence and delay future innovations. There are growing concerns that vaccine developers may scale back U.S.-based research as a result.

Meanwhile, supporters of Kennedy's approach say the shift is intended to rebuild public trust and ensure safety across all vaccine platforms. They argue that diversifying vaccine development beyond mRNA technologies will strengthen long-term health security.