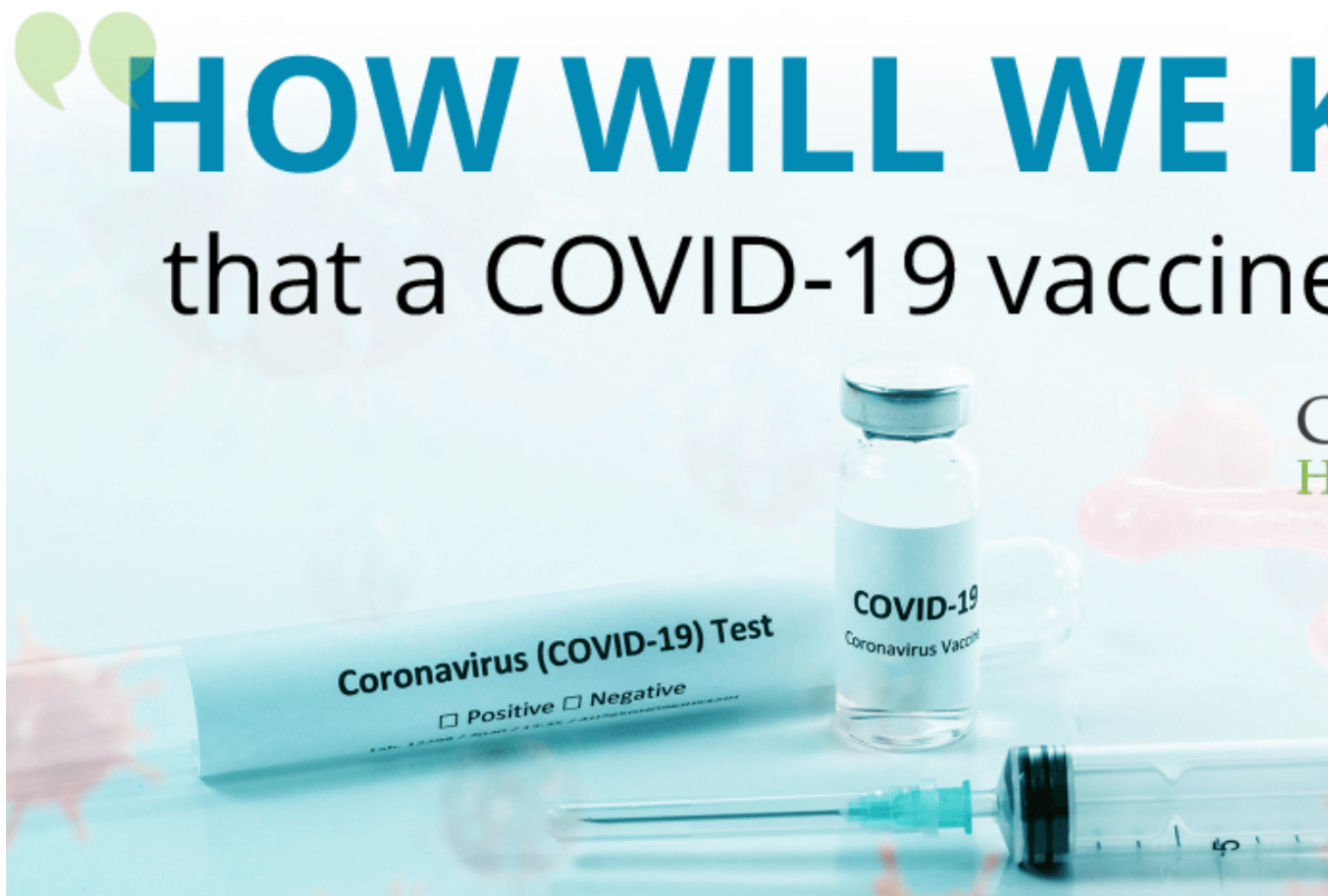


## Robert F. Kennedy, Jr: Environmental lawyer partners with Church of Scientology in anti-vaccine and anti-GMO activism

**R**obert Francis Kennedy, Jr. (born 1954) is the third child and second son of the late Attorney General, US Senator and Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy (RFK). He is an anti-vaccine, anti-GMO and anti-pesticide litigator who espouses health and environmental claims that stand outside mainstream science. He promotes his views through his nonprofit, [Children's Health Defense](#), formerly the World Mercury Project. It was founded in 2007 and re-branded in 2018. It opposes vaccines, mercury usage in dentistry and chemical/pesticide use. Kennedy was part of the plaintiff's litigation team in a 2018 lawsuit alleging Bayer's weedkiller Roundup (glyphosate) causes cancer. In addition to his anti-vaccine, anti-GMO advocacy, he claims 5G wireless causes cancer and other health issues, and has embraced numerous other fringe conspiracy theories.<sup>[1]</sup>

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kennedy has repeatedly argued that all vaccines are “unavoidably unsafe”, expressing his belief that [various vaccines to control the pandemic are dangerous](#). He has consistently attacked Bill Gates, who he accuses of masterminding a global effort to fund vaccine research in a secret plot to assume “[dictatorial control of global health policy](#).” In August 2020, Kennedy aligned himself with radical U.S. right-wing and European extremist groups spreading conspiracy claims that the coronavirus pandemic is “one big lie” by governments and multinational corporations led by Bill Gates to enslave the public via vaccine dependency and technological tracking of their activities.<sup>[2]</sup> In February 2021, [Instagram banned Kennedy](#) “for repeatedly sharing debunked claims about the coronavirus or vaccines,” a spokesperson for Facebook, which owns Instagram, said in a statement.



In August, 2020, [Kennedy filed suit in federal court](#) in California, alleging that Facebook’s fact-checking program for scientific or medical misinformation, which led them to limit anti-vaccination posts by Kennedy and other groups, violates his constitutional rights. A [recent study had found](#) that Kennedy, through his CHD organization, were responsible for more than half of the anti-vaccine advertisements on Facebook

when they were permitted. Facebook removed several anti-vaccine videos and promised to stop recommending anti-vaccine pages in addition to including a label at the top of the Children's Health Defense's (CHD) Facebook page which informs users that "this page posts about vaccines." Facebook also included a link to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website at the top of the CHD's Facebook and removed the group's ability to fundraise on the social media platform. The Kennedy-led suit ([PDF](#)) claimed that Facebook, CEO Mark Zuckerberg, and the organizations Science Feedback, Poynter and PolitiFact acted "jointly or in concert with federal government agencies" to infringe on CHD's First and Fifth Amendment rights. The suit also alleged Facebook and the fact-checking organizations colluded to commit wire fraud by "clearing the field" of anti-vaccine ads. The suit is pending, but several American judges have dismissed similar lawsuits in the past, arguing that social media companies are not bound by the First Amendment and have every right to censor users that violate its content policy.

## Career

After graduating from law school and passing the New York bar, Kennedy became an assistant district attorney in New York City. From 1984 until 2017, he was a board member and chief prosecuting attorney for Hudson Valley Riverkeeper, which advocated (and litigated) for cleaning up pollution from the Hudson River. He became a staff member of Riverkeeper after serving as an intern as restitution as part of his 1983 court sentence for heroin possession. [\[3\]](#)

From 1986 until 2017, Kennedy was a senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), an environmental activist group known [for its opposition](#) to chemicals and biotechnology, specifically the genetic engineering of crops. Kennedy is the president of the board of Waterkeeper Alliance, a non-profit environmental group that he helped found in 1999. For more than thirty years, Kennedy has been an adjunct professor of Environmental law at Pace University School of Law. Until August 2017, he also held the post as supervising attorney and co-director of Pace Law School's Environmental Litigation Clinic, which he founded in 1987.[\[4\]](#) He is currently professor emeritus at Pace.[\[5\]](#)

Kennedy co-hosts *Ring of Fire*, a nationally syndicated American radio program for plaintiffs' bar litigation issues.



## Education

- Attended Georgetown Preparatory School, a boarding school in Bethesda, Maryland
- Graduated from the Palfrey Street School in Massachusetts
- Graduated from Harvard College – 1976 BA American History and Literature
- Graduated University of Virginia School of Law – JD
- Graduated Pace University School of Law – Master of Laws

## Advocacy

### Environment and links to the Church of Scientology

Beginning with his internship at Riverkeeper, Kennedy became an attorney-advocate on environmental issues. One of his first cases with the firm was litigation against General Electric for PCB pollution of the Hudson River.<sup>[6]</sup> Kennedy co-founded *EcoWatch*, an environmental news site. In 2000, he also co-founded the law firm Kennedy and Madonna, which litigates environmental pollution cases; its most recent case involved a methane gas blowout at a facility in Porter Ranch, California. After that case, Kennedy took a position as co-counsel for the law firm Baum Hedlund Aristei & Goldman, which was founded by and continues to be managed by adherents of the Church of Scientology. He became involved in litigation against the manufacturer of Gardasil, the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine designed to prevent cervical cancer.<sup>[7]</sup> The firm has become instrumental in other environmental litigation cases, including lawsuits against the former Monsanto Corp. involving the herbicide glyphosate. In 2017, Kennedy resigned from Riverkeeper, citing his new residence on the west coast and his work with other advocacy groups.<sup>[8]</sup>

### Anti-vaccination

In 2003, Kennedy began writing articles and making statements in opposition to vaccines.<sup>[9]</sup> Since the mid-2000s, he has consistently claimed that vaccines are linked to autism in children, an allegation first made by a discredited British physician named Andrew Wakefield in a now-retracted paper published in *The Lancet*.<sup>[10]</sup> Kennedy has focused his advocacy on thimerosal, a compound of mercury that had been added to vaccine formulations to prevent contamination.<sup>[11]</sup> Thimerosal has never been shown to cause harm, but the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics asked vaccine makers to remove thimerosal from vaccine formulations. Even though Kennedy began making claims of a vast, international conspiracy to poison children with thimerosal-laden vaccines in 2005, the compound had been removed from most immunizations beginning in 2001.<sup>[12]</sup>

As far back as 2015, Kennedy has promoted the debunked link between vaccines and autism, claiming in numerous forums that [vaccines were causing a “holocaust” in the United States](#) and other western countries. That echoed claims made by the Church of Scientology and the Nation of Islam. Through the Children’s Health Defense, he has advocated against vaccines, claiming “fraud and corruption within the CDC and the pharmaceutical industry.” [\[13\]](#) Kennedy says he was “fighting multiple lawsuits on behalf of Riverkeeper and Waterkeeper against coal-fired power plants” when he was also speaking about “the dangers of mercury emissions, which, by then, had contaminated virtually every fresh water fish in America.” [\[14\]](#)

Through Children’s Health Defense, Kennedy assumed the self-appointed role of “vaccine safety” advocate. Most of his efforts consist of continued claims that vaccines contain thimerosal, which contains mercury. Mercury is indeed a neurotoxin, and children chronically exposed to mercury from food suffer delays in the development of their nervous systems. But the chemical formula of mercury in thimerosal is very different from mercury that causes health problems.[\[15\]](#)

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Kennedy’s claim that vaccines are unsafe because of thimerosal minimizes nine studies funded or performed by the CDC since 2003, as well as a 2000 safety review by the Institute of Medicine that found no health risks from the compound. [\[15\]](#) As for autism, only the Wakefield study showed any results connecting vaccines to autism. The study has since been retracted, and Wakefield has lost his medical license for committing fraud.[\[10\]](#)

In 2017, Kennedy announced that he would be the head of a panel on vaccine safety, established by newly inaugurated President Donald J. Trump. The White House transition team never formed the panel. [\[16\]](#)

Kennedy has been the keynote speaker at many high-profile anti-vaccine events, including a joint 2013 conference put on by AutismOne and Generation Rescue, both well-known anti-immunization groups. [\[17\]](#) , [\[18\]](#) Generation Rescue is headed by anti-vaccine advocate and actress Jenny McCarthy, and has issued statements against vaccines that misinterpret science. These include the claim that vaccination gave her son autism, that vaccines contain “toxins” including mercury, ether, antifreeze and aborted fetal tissue, and that she cured her son with a gluten- and casein-free diet.[\[19\]](#) AutismOne has issued written support for discredited researcher Andrew Wakefield, even inviting him to speak at their conference. [\[20\]](#)

A study published in the journal *Vaccine* in 2020 found that two buyers (Kennedy’s World Mercury Project—now Children’s Health Defense, and the Californian group Stop Mandatory Vaccination) were the purchasers of 54 percent of anti-vaccine advertising on Facebook. The study by researchers at the University of Maryland, George Washington University and Johns Hopkins University was conducted before Facebook changed its policies on allowing anti-vaccine advertising. [\[21\]](#)



In August 2020, Kennedy spoke at an outdoor rally in Berlin, protesting German Chancellor Angela Merkel's actions aimed at reducing exposure to SARS-Cov2, the virus causing COVID-19. The rally, consisting of a hodgepodge of organizations which included right-wing extremists and even Neo-Nazis, heard Kennedy warn against the 5G cellular network and Microsoft founder Bill Gates. With reference to his uncle's visit to Berlin in 1963, he said: "Today Berlin is again the front against totalitarianism." [\[2\]](#)

## Glyphosate

Glyphosate, the active ingredient in the weedkiller Roundup (first manufactured by Monsanto), has long been targeted by anti-GMO activists because several genetically modified crops (corn, soy and cotton) have been developed to withstand applications of the herbicide.

### Monsanto to Pay \$289.2M in Landmark Roundup Lawsuit Verdict

**"We were finally able to show the jury the secret, internal Monsanto documents proving that Monsanto has known for decades that glyphosate and specifically Roundup could cause cancer."**



Judge Bolanos' chambers: Dewayne Johnson with his trial team from Baum Hedlund and Miller Law and the jurors after their historic verdict in the Monsanto Roundup case.

## RFK JR Part of Baum Hedlund Litigation Team

Through the Church of Scientology law firm Baum Hedlund, Kennedy has sued Monsanto (now owned by Bayer) based on the claim that glyphosate causes non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL), a rare form of cancer, in workers who have applied the weedkiller. This claim is based on a 2015 monograph from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which declared glyphosate to be a "probable" carcinogen for workers, although it found no demonstrable dangers to the general public from trace exposure in food. The monograph has been heavily criticized for its sloppy methodology; concerns have also been raised that several authors of the report had financial ties to the law firms that sued Monsanto after IARC published its findings. [No other major federal hazard or risk agency in the world has concurred with the IARC findings](#), with many issuing direct rebuttals.[\[22\]](#)

Despite these limitations, Kennedy (and other lawyers) have leveraged the IARC 'hazard' finding to trigger the Daubert rule, which is a legal doctrine that allows personal injury lawsuits to be filed once a threshold of scientific information has been reported on the substance in question. Kennedy explains his justification for suing over glyphosate to Dr. Mark Hyman, a physician and wellness advocate as well as an opponent of the use of genetically modified crops and food:[\[23\]](#)

In 2018, Baum Hedlund scored the first victory against glyphosate, with a \$289 million verdict against Monsanto accused of giving groundskeeper DeWayne Johnson non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The jury decided that glyphosate more likely than not contributed to his cancer; the jury did not focus on studies showing that the causes of lymphomas are unknown; nor did they consider extensive research as noted by 16 other major research groups that there concluded there is no demonstrable link between the weedkiller and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The verdict has since been reduced by other courts.

In 2020, Kennedy claimed in an article for Children's Health Defense [\[24\]](#) that glyphosate and vaccines are responsible for rising obesity rates, particularly in children. The article quoted "studies by immunologist JB Classen showing vaccine induced immune overload" as a primary cause of childhood obesity. JB (John Bartholomew) Classen is an anti-vaccine activist who claims that "immunization causes a large number of other chronic diseases, including autism, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, autoimmune diseases, allergies, asthma, cancers and Gulf War Syndrome." Kennedy then connected obesity with glyphosate by quoting MIT computer scientist Stephanie Seneff and co-author Anthony Samsel, both well-known anti-GMO and anti-glyphosate advocates with no experience in toxicology or epidemiology. The pair has alleged that glyphosate is the cause of "obesity as well as numerous other toxic conditions."[\[25\]](#) While rates of obesity have indeed risen significantly since the 1980s, reputable studies have shown no connection with vaccines or glyphosate [\[25\]](#).

## Affiliates

- [Children's Health Defense](#)
- [Kennedy and Madonna](#)
- [Baum Hedlund](#)

- [Generation Rescue](#)
- [Zen Honeycutt](#)
- [Charles Benbrook](#)
- [The Organic and Natural Health Association](#)
- [Philip Landrigan](#)
- [Carey Gillam](#)
- [Moms Across America](#)

## Quotes and Claims

“As an attorney and environmentalist who has spent years working on issues of mercury toxicity, I frequently met mothers of autistic children who were absolutely convinced that their kids had been injured by vaccines. — “Deadly Immunity,” [Rolling Stone/Salon](#) 2005 .

“Our public health authorities knowingly allowed the pharmaceutical industry to poison an entire generation of American children, their actions arguably constitute one of the biggest scandals in the annals of American medicine.” — “[Deadly Immunity](#)”

“When I started reading about thimerosal, I was dumbstruck by the gulf between the scientific reality and the media consensus. All the network news anchors and television doctors were assuring the public that there was not a single study that suggested thimerosal was unsafe or that it could cause autism. After a short time on PubMed, I’d identified many dozens of studies suggesting that thimerosal causes autism and a rich library of peer-reviewed literature—over 400 published studies—attesting to its deadly toxicity and its causal connection to a long inventory of neurological injuries and organ damage.” — [Interview, Children’s Health Defense](#)

“In fact, Cheerios have more glyphosate per serving than vitamin D and vitamin B12 which are added to enrich the cereal. It’s even been in commercial honey. So, it’s a big problem. It’s linked to cancer, it’s linked to all these health issues.” — [Interview with Dr. Mark Hyman](#), July 2020

## Criticisms

- [RFK Jr. Is Our Brother and Uncle. He's Tragically Wrong About Vaccines](#), Politico, By Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Joseph P. Kennedy II and Maeve Kennedy McKean, May 8, 2019
- [Anti-Vaxxer RFK JR. joins neo-Nazis in massive Berlin ‘Anti-Corona’ Protest](#) by Daily Kos, August 2020 – “Tens of thousands ‘Corona-Truthers’ descended on Berlin today to protest the measures implemented by Angela Merkel and her government to prevent the coronavirus spread... The protest was organized by right-wing extremist organizations- including the AfD party and various anti-Semitic conspiracy groups as well as the neo-Nazi NPD party. Among the speakers was Robert F. Kennedy Jr.. who warned against the “totalitarianism” of Angela Merkel... Protester were seen carrying poster urging “Trump, Please Help” with the QAnon logo.” (Note: RFK, Jr had been tapped by Donald Trump to lead a White House panel inquiry into vaccine safety at the beginning of his presidency. The Panel was never convened.)



- [Robert Kennedy Jr, Antikommunist](#) *Neus Deutschland*, August 2020 – “Robert F. Kennedy whipped up a mass of anti-coronavirus opponents, Nazis, conspiracy theorists and eso-hippies in Berlin. The 66-year-old received a lot of applause for his crude theses – for example that the corona pandemic had been planned for decades and would be used to introduce a digital currency that marked the beginning of slavery... (Kennedy) supported a conspiracy-theoretical pamphlet by several bishops, in which it is claimed that the measures to contain the pandemic are the “prelude to the creation of a world government beyond control...”
- [Robert F. Kennedy Jr: Anti-Vaxxer](#), June 5, 2013 – “RFK Jr. has a long history of adhering to crackpot ideas about vaccines, mostly in the form of the now thoroughly disproven link to autism. He’s been hammering this issue for a decade now, and his claims appear to be no better and no more accurate now than they were when he first started making them.” Phil Plait, *Slate*.
- In 1995, Premier Ralph Klein of Alberta declared Kennedy persona non grata in the province due to [Kennedy’s activism](#) against Alberta’s large-scale hog production facilities.
- In 2002, a federal judge dismissed a [class action lawsuit](#) against Smithfield Foods, Inc. filed by a coalition of plaintiffs’ lawyers led by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and in a rare move, ruled that Kennedy and the other lawyers must pay Smithfield’s costs and legal fees. At a series of news conferences in 2001 Kennedy announced his intention to use this and other lawsuits as a means of “shutting down Smithfield’s farm operations.”

## Personal

Kennedy has been married three times and publicly reported sex and drug addiction problems. He was arrested for heroin possession in 1983. He’s been alleged to have sought to bribe journalists to cover up reports of his and his relatives disreputable behavior.[\[26\]](#)

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