



The Daily Dish

Avian Flu Vaccine Grounded

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | MAY 30, 2025

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. canceled contracts with Moderna worth over \$750 million to develop and produce mRNA-based bird flu vaccines. Fox News [reported](#) it thus:

After a rigorous review, we concluded that continued investment in Moderna's H5N1 mRNA vaccine was not scientifically or ethically justifiable," HHS Communications Director Andrew Nixon said. "This is not simply about efficacy — it's about safety, integrity, and trust. The reality is that mRNA technology remains under-tested, and we are not going to spend taxpayer dollars repeating the mistakes of the last administration, which concealed legitimate safety concerns from the public."

Let's put aside the obligatory shot (pun intended) taken at the Biden Administration and abstain from reviewing the anti-vaxxer credentials of the secretary. Eakinomics simply thinks that HHS has an obligation to do a little better than this. For example, Eakinomics cannot find the Nixon statement anywhere on the HHS website, despite being widely reported, even using its search function. For something this important, a real statement explaining the decision to the public is in order. It is not acceptable to hide behind a press release sent only to journalists.

Such a statement would explain what exactly is meant by "under-tested." What is the standard for testing that is being invoked? How was it determined? Is there a plan to do more testing and thus eliminate the "under-tested" designation?

What is the breadth of this decision? There have been concerns over, for example, myocarditis as a side effect of the existing COVID-19 vaccine. Is it the COVID-19 and trial H5 avian flu vaccines? Or is it all potential mRNA-developed vaccines?

What is meant by “ethically justifiable”? Again, it is clear that the Trump Administration wants to focus attention on the previous administration and claims that it knowingly suppressed information about safety risks. That presumably would qualify as ethically unjustifiable. But how does that past action on a different vaccine justify this administration’s handling of a bird flu vaccine?

You can be sure not everyone agrees with the decision. Reuters, for example, [quoted](#) Senior Scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security Amesh Adalja as saying: “The cancellation means that the government is discarding what could be one of the most effective and rapid tools to combat an avian influenza outbreak.”

The decision is important and controversial. It deserves a clear explanation.