

pollution, that's colonization," he says.

The skies are a global resource, shared by all of humanity, and it is crucial that decisions about its use account for the needs of all stakeholders. Satellite connectivity remains a boon for many people, including Indigenous communities in remote and under-served areas. This is why the conversation about astronomy and satellites cannot be reduced to 'satellites are bad and we must save the night skies for astronomy'. Satellites and astronomy can co-exist. It is up to everyone to find the path forward together.

## Vaccines save lives. Leaders must champion them

**Attacks on vaccines and the cancellation of research into what causes vaccine hesitancy puts people in harm's way.**

**M**easles is a highly contagious disease that can be fatal, particularly in young children. Nevertheless, every death it causes – some 107,500 in 2023, the latest year for which data are available – is avoidable. One invention has the power to wipe out the disease. And it is thanks to that invention – vaccines – that the World Health Organization has been able to declare 82 countries around the world as having eliminated measles.

One of those nations is the United States, but many fear it will not remain so for much longer. A dangerous measles outbreak is raging in Texas. It was detected in late January and, about a month later, an otherwise healthy but unvaccinated six-year-old died from the disease – the first person in a decade to lose their life to measles in the United States.

Measles is on the rise in almost every world region. In 2023, 57 countries around the globe experienced large or disruptive outbreaks, an increase from 36 in 2022. These outbreaks correspond with a decline in people getting vaccinated. In some cases, that decline coincides with active campaigns – often spearheaded by people with power and influence – communicating information about vaccines that is not in line with internationally accepted public-health advice.

We urge all leaders, for the good of their nations' health, not to ignore or contradict advice that is supported by a consensus of evidence from research. We urge policymakers to help boost people's confidence in vaccines, and not to undermine scientific and medical institutions or the process of research. At present, this leadership is particularly lacking in the United States, and there is a real risk that this will cost lives.

Responding to the Texas outbreak, Robert F. Kennedy Jr,

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the secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), has acknowledged that vaccines are important. But he has simultaneously, and irresponsibly, praised the benefits of cod liver oil and vitamin A supplements for treating the disease. Moreover, he has postponed a meeting of vaccine advisers to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The meeting, which was due to have been held at the end of February, was yet to be rescheduled when *Nature* went to press. Kennedy has also said that the HHS will investigate the recommended childhood vaccination schedule. He should outline the scientific evidence for this move and provide reassurance that there will not be a reduction in vaccines coverage.

Earlier this month, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) cut funding for crucial research aiming to understand why some people are hesitant to get themselves, or their children, vaccinated. Neither the NIH nor the HHS has issued a public communication to explain the reasons for this, nor why the CDC is reportedly planning a new study into whether vaccines cause autism.

Running such a study at a time of extreme cost-cutting makes little sense. If it goes ahead, the CDC or the HHS should publish the terms of reference and ensure that there is an open call for proposals, so all those with relevant knowledge, experience and qualifications can apply. Although *Nature* would generally be the first to support scientific studies, in this case it's imperative to take into account what is already known: namely, that extensive research has not found any link between vaccines and autism.

In one landmark study, for instance, researchers in Denmark recorded the vaccination status of more than 650,000 children born in the country from 1999 to 2010. They combined those data, on measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccines, with data on autism spectrum disorder diagnoses. They found no difference in incidences of autism between vaccinated and unvaccinated children (A. Hviid *et al. Ann. Intern. Med.* **170**, 513–520; 2019).

Many people have serious concerns and questions about vaccines; some are hesitant to receive vaccines and some refuse to be vaccinated. All of those involved in vaccine provision, from public-health staff to physicians and policymakers to researchers, need to listen to people's worries. Questions should be answered using the best available knowledge; what is and isn't known should be communicated transparently; and the benefits and the risks (including possible side effects) must be explained clearly.

Responsible leaders should draw on the many decades of accumulated knowledge on vaccines and encourage people to look at data that support getting vaccinated. They should not propagate ideas that are out of line with accepted, fact-based public-health advice. People who avoid vaccines are putting their own lives and those of their families and communities at unnecessary risk.

It is often said that the first responsibility of any government is the safety and protection of its people. That alone should be reason enough for policymakers to encourage people to get themselves and their children vaccinated. Vaccines save lives, and casting doubt on their safety could have dangerous and far-reaching consequences.