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HEALTH

# The Most Devastating COVID Report So Far

The silence is deafening...



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By **Brownstone Institute**



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Guest post by [Jayanta Bhattacharya](#)

The House [report on HHS Covid propaganda](#) is devastating. The Biden administration spent almost \$1 billion to push falsehoods about Covid vaccines, boosters, and masks on the American people. If a pharma company had run the campaign, it would have been fined out of existence.

HHS engaged a PR firm, the Fors Marsh Group (FMG), for the propaganda campaign. The main goal was to increase Covid vax uptake. The strategy: 1. Exaggerate Covid mortality risk 2. Downplay the fact that there was no good evidence that the Covid vax stops transmission.

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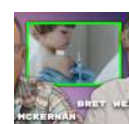
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Based on reports shared with the Committee, FMG spent on average over \$20 million per month for the design and execution of the Campaign.<sup>9</sup> In its proposal for the task order, the company asserted that it could benefit ASPA by using a strategic mix of paid and earned media with exclusive radio partnerships, research-based messaging, and reinforced messaging from trusted influencers, celebrities, and sports figures.<sup>10</sup> FMG’s Campaign strategies were grounded in several theories of behavior change and communication, “with the expectation that exposure to Campaign messages prompts change in cognitions antecedent to Campaign-targeted behavior.”<sup>11</sup> The health belief model, used by the Campaign, posits that “a person’s belief in a personal threat of an illness or disease together with a person’s belief in the effectiveness of the recommended health behavior or action will predict the likelihood the person will adopt the behavior.”<sup>12</sup>

The propaganda campaign extended beyond vax uptake and included exaggerating mask efficacy and pushing for social distancing and school closures.

Ultimately, since the messaging did not match reality, the campaign collapsed public trust in public health.

Over the course of its existence, the Campaign came to serve as a critical vehicle for disseminating the Biden-Harris administration’s messaging on mask usage, social distancing, vaccine effectiveness, the risks COVID-19 posed to children, and how to reopen schools, businesses, and civil society. As the Committee of jurisdiction over public health, it is important for the Committee—and federal public health entities—to understand why the Campaign led to a loss of public trust in HHS and its agencies, as well as consider reforms that will prevent a repeat of the same failure during potential future public health emergencies. This report is a chronological examination of ads, blog posts, and other public relations material produced for the “We Can Do This” Campaign and overlays Campaign activity with critical events during the Biden-Harris administration’s response to the pandemic.

The PR firm (FMG) drew most of its faulty science from the CDC’s “guidance,” which ignored the FDA’s findings on the vaccine’s limitations, as well as scientific findings from other countries that contradicted CDC groupthink.

Much of the scientific content directly featured in or alluded to in Campaign ads and other promotional material was drawn from CDC recommendations, guidance, and research, critical parts of which proved to be deeply flawed. The CDC’s errors and failures to update recommendations and guidance were reflected in the “We Can Do This” ads and promotional materials:

- CDC’s guidance, which the Campaign relied on, went beyond the terms of FDA’s Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) to state, without evidence, that COVID vaccines were highly effective against transmission. This ultimately had a negative impact on vaccine confidence and the CDC’s credibility when proven untrue.<sup>14</sup>
- The CDC had inconsistent and flawed messaging about the effectiveness of masks.<sup>15</sup>
- The CDC consistently overstated the risk of COVID-19 to children.<sup>16</sup>
- The CDC continues to recommend COVID-19 vaccines for all Americans ages six months and older, which has made the United States a global outlier in COVID-19 policy.<sup>17</sup>

The report details the CDC’s mask flip-flopping through the years. It’s especially infuriating to recall the CDC’s weird, anti-scientific, anti-human focus on masking toddlers with cloth masks into 2022.

Only in January 2022 did the CDC update its masking guidelines, finally acknowledging for the **first time in two years**, that cloth masks and face coverings “do not offer as much protection as surgical masks or respirators.”<sup>42</sup> At that time, around half of the country’s 53 million children remained compulsorily masked.<sup>43</sup> Many states closely followed CDC guidance and required masks for students of all ages, regardless of vaccination status. Some localities went beyond CDC guidance, requiring masks for students outdoors at recess.<sup>44</sup> Most masks worn by children were cloth masks which, by the CDC’s own admission, did not offer significant protection against viral spread.<sup>45</sup> In response to the January 2022 updated guidance from the CDC, some school districts updated their mask policy to exclude cloth masks, with states issuing child sized KN95 masks to schools.<sup>46</sup>

President Biden’s Covid advisor Ashish K. Jha waited until Dec. 2022 (right after leaving government service) to tell the country that “[t]here is no study in the world that shows that masks work that well.” What took him so long?

In December of 2022, after leaving the Biden White House, former COVID-19 coordinator, Ashish Jha, freely admitted what many had been saying all along—“[t]here is no study in the world that shows that masks work that well.”<sup>57</sup>

In 2021, former CDC director, Rochelle Walensky rewrote CDC guidance on social distancing at the behest of the national teachers’ union, guaranteeing that schools would remain closed to in-person learning for many months.

On February 18, 2021, the CDC released school re-opening guidance that, if implemented, would have prevented “more than 90% of schools in the United States, including in almost all of the 50 largest counties in the country, from fully reopening.”<sup>66</sup> Doctors who reviewed the guidance expressed dismay that the CDC’s newly released guidance would continue to keep schools closed for months, even after they could realistically reopen safely.<sup>67</sup>

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and Congressional investigations later revealed CDC’s school reopening guidance was influenced by the American Federation of Teachers’ (AFT) President, Randi Weingarten. Weingarten received direct access to then-CDC Director Rochelle Walensky. Through this quiet backchannel to the CDC, the AFT was directly able to edit guidance and push for prolonged school closures.<sup>68</sup>

During this period, the PR firm FMG put out ads telling parents that schools would close unless kids masked up, stayed away from friends, and got Covid-vaccinated.

Despite all of the evidence to the contrary, the “We Can Do This” Campaign messaging consistently emphasized the possibility of renewed school closures if parents failed to force their children to wear masks, socially distance from friends, or get and stay up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine. The Campaign and the CDC persisted in this messaging after it was apparent schools were not superspreader locations and children were not at high risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19.

In March 2021, even as the CDC told the American people that the vaxxed did not need to mask, the PR firm ran ads saying that masks were still needed, even for the vaxxed. “It’s not time to ease up” we were told, in the absence of evidence any of that did any good.

### March 18, 2021: Around Here, (Radio) (Audio)<sup>108</sup> (Script)<sup>109</sup>

My family's lived in our town for six generations, so looking out for our neighbors is something that comes naturally to us. So when COVID hit, we did what it took to protect each other. **Now vaccines are here and some folks are easin' up a bit, but that's a big mistake. That's because there are these new forms of the virus and they're spreading quickly. Want to know how to fight 'em? Just do what you've been doing. Got a mask that fits good and snug? Perfect. Giving your neighbors at least six feet of space, avoiding crowds, and not hanging out inside other people's houses? That's all good stuff, and now, it's more important than ever. Look, I'll definitely get my vaccine when it's my turn, but now isn't the time to let your guard or your mask down** (emphasis added).

In 2021, to support the Biden/Harris administration's push for vax mandates, the PR firm pushed the false idea that the vax stopped Covid transmission. When people started getting "breakthrough" infections, public trust in public health collapsed.

Even with clear disagreement between CDC Director Walensky and CDC scientists, from March 2021 to at least January 2022 when federal vaccine mandates went into effect, the "We Can Do This" Campaign often adopted Director Walensky's message that COVID-19 vaccines stop transmission.<sup>123</sup> The Campaign's messages in the spring, sponsored by HHS and the CDC, were in large part based on the mistaken assumption that the COVID-19 vaccines reduced transmission. The Biden-Harris administration, HHS, and the CDC had, in effect, wagered their credibility with the American people on the issue of COVID-19 vaccinations based on the premise that vaccinated individuals could not transmit COVID-19 to others. This ended up being a critical mistake when, just months later, breakthrough COVID-19 infections in vaccinated people began being widely reported.

Later, when the FDA approved the vax for 12 to 15-year-old kids, the PR firm told parents that schools could open in fall 2021 only if they got their kids vaccinated. These ads never mentioned side effects like myocarditis due to the vax.

On May 10, 2021, the FDA expanded its EUA of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to include adolescents aged 12-15 years.<sup>124</sup> Two days later, on May 12, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) made its interim recommendation that all 12-15-year-olds get vaccinated.<sup>125</sup> Central to the Campaign's messaging on the need to vaccinate 12-15-year-olds was the premise that vaccination was key to reopening schools in the fall for in-person instruction. The CDC repeatedly issued statements, guidance documents, and other materials stressing that COVID-19 vaccines and booster shots were necessary for school re-openings. The CDC's insistence that schools could only safely reopen when all children were vaccinated (the vast majority of whom were at low risk for severe illness from COVID-19)<sup>126</sup> suggests the Biden-Harris Administration was implementing policies dictated by its political allies in teachers' unions, rather than by the best scientific evidence available at the time.<sup>127</sup>

HHS has scrubbed the propaganda ads from this era from its web pages. It's easy to see why. They are embarrassing. They tell kids, in effect, that they should treat other kids like biohazards unless they are vaccinated.

The HHS taxpayer-funded Campaign used emotionally manipulative ads to make clear that getting vaccinated was the only way to see friends, hang out, go on dates, have parties, vacation, and have sleepovers. **In the summer of 2024, all HHS Campaign materials available on YouTube were made private and are no longer accessible to the public.**

June 16, 2021: Yes (Video)<sup>129</sup>

“Say yes. Say yes to seeing friends. Yes to hanging out. Yes to vacations. Yes to sleepovers. After a year of saying no. Imagine how good yes is going to feel. Everyone 12 and older is now eligible for COVID vaccines.”

When the Delta variant arrived, the PR firm doubled down on fear-mongering, masking, and social distancing.

July 19, 2021: Two radio ads targeting Native American parents

Double Up Mom (Radio) (Audio)<sup>155</sup> (Script)<sup>156</sup>

“My mom is interesting; she goes to the grocery store and buys two of everything. I ask her, “what’s the deal?” She tells me that there is nothing worse than cooking dinner for the family and you need more of something and it’s not there. She said she would rather go all-in and double-up to make sure she is covered. I get it.

I am now doing that with the pandemic. I know many people are getting the vaccine, but there are new forms of the virus, and I don’t want to take the chance. **Wearing a well-fitted mask, keeping 6 feet apart, and avoiding crowds are my way of doubling-up against the virus.** We need to continue to protect our people and our tribal communities.

**Help prevent the spread of the new forms of the virus by continuing to wear a snug mask, keep 6 feet apart when you’re around others, and when it’s your turn get vaccinated”** (emphasis added).

Double Up Dad (Radio) (Audio)<sup>157</sup> (Script)<sup>158</sup>

“My son and I were headed down to the store when he asked me why I always get an extra bag of nuts and an extra water. Well, it’s a backup, I tell him. It’s doubling-up, so you are covered for later.

**He then asks me why I am still avoiding crowded places and wearing my mask since I already got the vaccine. I say son, “it’s the double-up effect.”** It’s doing our part and doing what is right, so we are protected. There are new forms of the virus, so we need to double-up to beat them,

In September 2021, CDC director Walensky overruled the agency’s external experts to recommend the booster to all adults rather than just the elderly. The director’s action was “highly unusual” and went beyond the FDA’s approval of the booster for only the elderly.

On September 22, 2021, nine days after the *Lancet* article was published, the FDA amended its EUA of the Pfizer vaccine to allow a single booster dose to be administered at least six months after completion of the primary series in the elderly, in individuals at high risk of severe COVID-19, and in individuals aged 18-64 who had completed a primary vaccine series and whose frequent institutional or occupational exposure to the virus put them at high risk of serious complications of COVID-19.<sup>176</sup>

The following day, ACIP approved the use of a single booster dose of the Pfizer vaccine in the elderly and in individuals at high risk of severe COVID-19 infection. However, ACIP voted **against** recommending booster doses in individuals aged 18-64 who had completed a primary vaccine series and who may be exposed to COVID-19 through occupational or institutional settings.<sup>177</sup>

CDC Director Walensky approved ACIP's recommendations to allow the use of booster doses in the elderly and in high-risk individuals. However, in a **highly unusual** move, Director Walensky overruled ACIP and issued her own recommendation allowing booster doses for healthy individuals at risk of occupational COVID-19 infection.<sup>178</sup> Walensky's decision to go against her own agency's advisers surprised not only ACIP members, but also members of her staff and other experts.<sup>179</sup> An ACIP member who voted against recommending boosters for younger individuals with occupational risk stated "the committee was being drawn into an 'emotional situation' and that it needed to focus on the science," which had not supported the use of boosters in younger age groups.<sup>180</sup>

The PR campaign and the CDC persistently overestimated the mortality risk of Covid infection in kids to scare parents into vaccinating their children with the Covid vax.

The CDC and the Campaign continuously overstated the risks COVID-19 posed to children, presumably to scare parents into vaccinating their children. They persisted in this messaging despite ever-increasing scientific evidence that the virus posed a minimal risk to children.

In March of 2022, the CDC admitted to overcounting COVID-19 deaths. This overcounting was associated with a faulty algorithm in the CDC COVID Data Tracker's mortality data.<sup>273</sup> The overcounting applied to death tallies in **all age-groups**, including children. After the CDC recalculated, the number of pediatric deaths decreased by 24 percent.<sup>274</sup> At the same time, data from the American Academy of Pediatrics showed **pediatric deaths accounted for less than 0.26 percent of all COVID-19 deaths**.<sup>275</sup> An independent analysis found 25 instances where the CDC reported statistical or numerical errors in relation to its COVID-19 data.<sup>276</sup> 80 percent of these errors exaggerated the severity of the COVID-19 situation.<sup>277</sup>

In Aug. 2021, the military imposed its Covid vax mandate, leading to 8,300 servicemen being discharged. Since 2023, the DOD has been trying to get the discharged servicemen to reenlist. What harm has been done to American national security by the vax mandate?

On August 25, 2021, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin issued a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for military service members.<sup>206</sup> The mandate also required that any recruit going into the armed services be fully vaccinated and boosted.<sup>207</sup> The mandate would result in over 8,300 service members being discharged for refusing to get the vaccine.<sup>208</sup> It remained in place until it was repealed on December 23, 2022 under the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, at the insistence of Congressional Republicans.<sup>209</sup> Since its repeal, the Department of Defense has made repeated efforts to entice discharged unvaccinated veterans to rejoin.<sup>210</sup>

The Biden/Harris administration imposed the OSHA, CMS, and military vax mandates, even though the CDC knew that the Delta variant evaded vaccine immunity. The PR campaign studiously avoided informing Americans about waning vaccine efficacy in the face of variants.

The Biden-Harris administration's vaccine mandates were a flawed policy that increased distrust in the public health enterprise. The mandates were unpopular and further fueled vaccine skepticism, particularly with an American public already showing pandemic fatigue. To make matters worse, the COVID-19 vaccine mandates were based on faulty or outdated assumptions about the COVID-19 pandemic.

For instance, by the time mandates were imposed, the Delta variant was the predominate circulating variant. The three COVID-19 vaccines had been tested against earlier variants circulating in March of 2021. The vaccines were much less effective at preventing infection against the Delta variant.<sup>232</sup> **The risk of a future variant evading vaccine immunity was well understood by the CDC and other medical experts, but somehow still not adequately communicated to the American public.**

The propaganda campaign hired celebrities and influencers to “persuade” children to get the Covid vax.

I think if a celebrity is paid to advertise a faulty product, that celebrity should be partially liable if the product harms some people.

In addition to providing national locations where children could get a COVID-19 vaccine, the blogs and vlogs sought to emotionally persuade parents and adolescents, through misleading statistics, photos, anecdotal stories of personal tragedies, and even monetary incentives. Notably, the Campaign expended taxpayer dollars on celebrities and social media influencers fully knowing, based on internal surveys, that only 8 percent of adults reported seeking out information about COVID-19 from celebrities and social media influencers in a given month.<sup>238</sup>

While the Campaign was promoting content encouraging eligible children over the age of five to get vaccinated, the Campaign started priming parents in anticipation of FDA authorization of vaccines for children younger than five. In addition to local parent influencers, the Campaign recruited celebrity moms such as America Ferrera and Kelly Rowland, to help promote vaccination for younger children, particularly 2-4-year-olds, for whom the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 are negligible.<sup>254</sup> In each instance, the influencer was chosen to target a specific demographic (e.g., African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders). At a time when Americans were looking for assurances, quality information, and scientific rigor, CDC and HHS, through the Campaign, chose to hire Hollywood spokespeople to perpetuate an influence campaign that was not rooted in fact.

In the absence of evidence, the propaganda campaign ran ads telling parents that the vaccine would prevent their kids from getting Long Covid.



August 24, 2022: Ask a Doctor: Will a vaccine help protect my child from COVID? (Video)<sup>301</sup>

“Make sure your child is up to date on vaccines and boosters helps protect them from COVID symptoms that can last for weeks and even months after the infection. This is sometimes called “long COVID”. After getting covid, children and teens can experience a wide range of health problems that may affect their quality of life such as extreme tiredness or difficulty thinking and concentrating.”

With the collapse in public trust in the CDC, parents have begun to question all CDC advice. Predictably, the HHS propaganda campaign has led to a decline in the uptake of routine childhood vaccines.

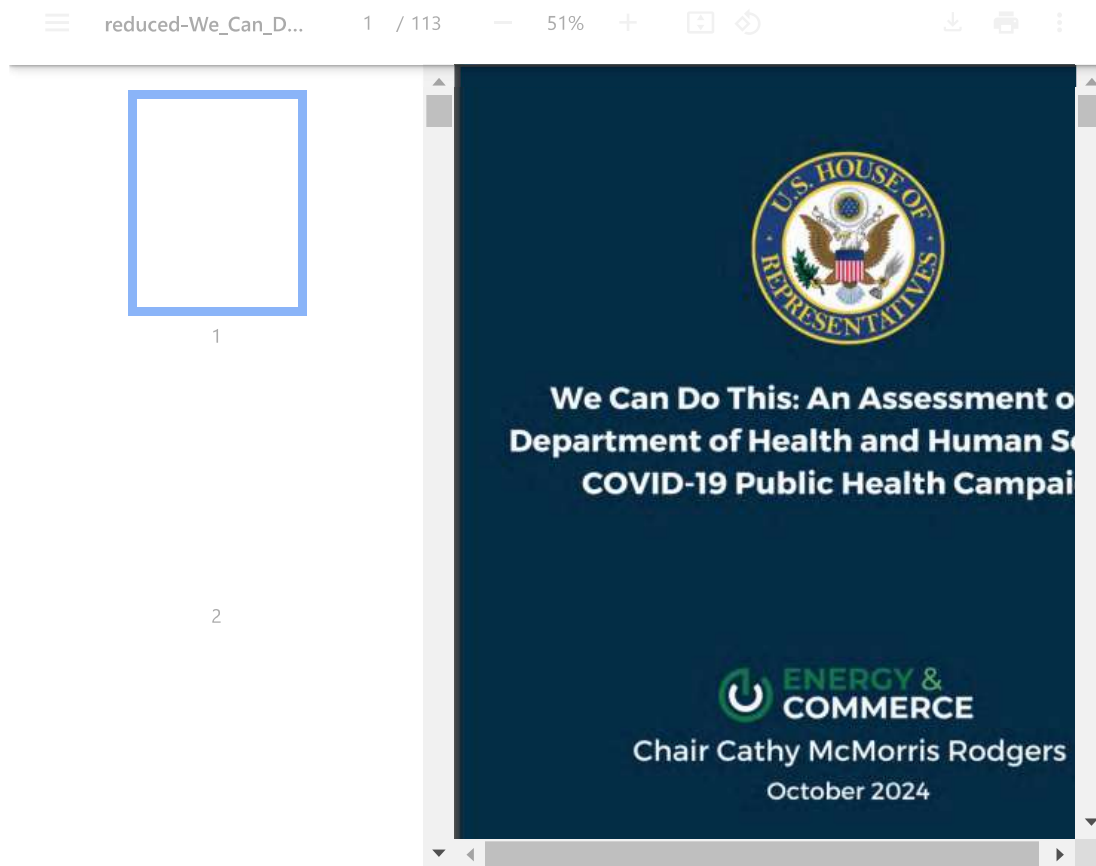
In December of 2023, a previous interview with former NIH Director Francis Collins surfaced where Collins “admitted to having a ‘narrow,’ ‘really unfortunate’ mindset during the Covid-19 pandemic that prevented himself and other public health officials from considering the potential collateral damage of their decisions.”<sup>325</sup> The CDC’s ongoing booster recommendation for children as young as six months of age suggests the agency has not deviated, nor learned any lessons, from this narrow-mindedness. Public health experts continue to warn that the CDC’s recommendations have a lasting impact on its credibility. The CDC’s insistence on a vaccine with marginal benefit has also unfortunately led the public to question other agency guidance, such as the efficacy and need for routine childhood vaccinations against measles and diphtheria. Data has shown that the percentage of kindergarteners vaccinated with all state-required vaccines, including MMR, DTaP, polio, and varicella, is dropping relative to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>326</sup> At the same time, the numbers of kindergarteners requesting an exemption from one or more required vaccinations increased from pre-pandemic levels to its highest level to date.<sup>327</sup>

The report makes several recommendations, including formally defining the CDC’s core mission to focus on disease prevention, forcing HHS propaganda to abide by the FDA’s product labeling rules, and revamping the process of evaluating vaccine safety.

- Congress should consider formally authorizing the CDC and clearly define the agency’s core mission.
- HHS and its agencies should abide by the FDA’s product labeling guidelines. HHS and its agencies should be barred from promoting information regarding an FDA-regulated product that does not reflect the FDA-approved label.
- Congress should consider clarifying responsibility for evaluating the safety of vaccines and streamline existing reporting systems for capturing vaccine injuries and adverse reactions.
- HHS and its agencies should embrace a culture of transparency and accountability.
- HHS and public health officials should not attempt to silence dissenting scientific opinions.
- HHS and its agencies should overhaul their website archival process to mimic that of prior White House administrations.

Probably the most important recommendation: HHS should never again adopt a policy of silencing dissenting scientists in an attempt to create an illusion of consensus in favor of CDC groupthink.

You can find a copy of the full House report [here](#). The HHS must take its findings seriously if there is any hope for public health to regain public.



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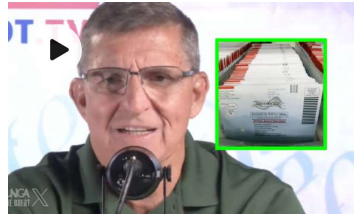
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